





# RELEASE THAT WITCH

BOOK 07

*Er Mu*

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

# **Release That Witch**

(放开那个女巫)

by

**Er Mu**

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# Synopsis

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Cheng Yan transmigrated only to end up in a medieval Europe like world, becoming Roland, a Royal Prince. But this world doesn't seem to be the same as his former world, despite some similarities. Witches are real and they actually can use magic?

Follow Roland's battle for the throne against his siblings. Will he be able to win, even though the king already declared him to be a hopeless case and with the worst starting situation? With his knowledge of modern technologies and the help of the witches, who are known as devils' servants and are hunted by the the Holy Church, he might have a fighting chance.

Now, let his journey begin.

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# Chapter 601: The Stargazer

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Observatory, City of Dawn in Graycastle.

With the collapse of Timothy's regime, the name of the king's city had gone with the wind. Astrologer of Dispersion Star had expected turbulence after that, but out of his expectation, the order of the city did not change a lot. People still moved through their daily routines. Farmers tilled their land in the suburbs, stonemasons worked on repairing the damaged city wall and blacksmiths banged over the armors in the store. The patrol team continued to play the cat-and-mouse game with the refugees in Black Street. It still seemed to be one of the most prosperous cities in the kingdom.

There were also some inevitable changes. For example, everyday people left the king's city to find new chances in the Western Region. The Alchemist Workshop in the king's city, the old rival of the Astrology Association, even moved out from City of Dawn. Some nobles, who had remained unknown to the public before, appeared within the palace now scrambling for the land and power left by the former noble families. As for the sages, they were completely forgotten. No one came to inquire about the future of the kingdom or ask them to foretell the future.

If it was not for the food and gold royals regularly provided by the officials left by His Majesty Roland, those apprentices of the Astrological Station would have already fled.

Luckily, they still worked for the Astrology Association even now.

As long as the Astrological Station existed, the mission of the astrologers would not be suspended.

## "The Forever Stargazer"

The sun sank into the mountains in the west. The color of the sky changed from a gamboge to a dull red, and eventually to a deep purple... As the night fell, the astrologers started their work.

The wind-proof oil lamp had been ignited on a hathpace. The apprentices carried stargazing gears out of the warehouse one by one. They had to be extremely careful when moving these things in order to avoid any damage. Otherwise, they would be punished by lashes and salary deduction. The stargazing gears sent by His Majesty Roland were handled with the greatest care.

The Astrologer of Dispersion Star had not taken these instruments in the wooden box from Roland seriously when he had received them.

Admittedly, His Majesty had once promised to bring more advanced stargazing gears to the Astrology Association, but the preparation of the instruments was a process of extreme complexity. It usually took about a year to select the materials and manufacture a stargazing gear, and would cost approximately 100 gold royals.

If there were any similarities with the sage arts, the most obvious feature would be money-consumption. Astrology could hardly

produce anything like the products obtained from alchemy, which could grow in popularity due to the nobles and rich merchants supporting the alchemists. Therefore, only the capital of a country could afford to build an observatory. Based on what he knew, Border Town had still been a shabby, poor place only two years ago. He had thought that even if the Western Region had plundered a large sum of money from waging wars, they were not necessarily willing to allocate these gold royals to the astrologers far away.

However, Astrologer of Dispersion Star had been stunned the moment he had opened the wooden box.

He had never seen such a tool for observing stars. Different from the bamboo-shaped instrument used by the Astrology Association, its metal cylinder was the size of a bucket. The glass mirror embedded was bright enough to reflect the image of the people. No trace of scratches could be found on it, no matter how close one got to see.

The active gear of the stargazing gear was an ingenious design. It was merely a thumb-sized rotary knob at the tail end and was very convenient to use. As long as you pinched it and rotated gently, the distance between the lens could be corrected, and there was no need to lock it after the adjustment.

His Majesty Roland gave him three batches of new-style stargazing gears, six instruments in total. The king had given them a simple name "astronomical telescope".

Dispersion Star did not want to give an eye to his original old-



fashioned instrument after he used the astronomical telescope.

The rest of five telescopes were naturally handed over to the five most experienced astrologers in the Astrological Station.

"Master, all of the stargazing gears are in their places," Yun, the chief disciple reported.

"Have you finished the division of the constellation?"

"Yes. Astrologer of Brightsky Star who is responsible for the North One area, is ill today, and Astrologer of Void Star will take his place," he glimpsed at the log book in his hand and said.

"Then light the flame, we shall start to observe star." The chief astrologer ordered.

"Yes!"

The fire blazed out from the brazier in the center of the Astrological Station, which symbolized the brightest Phosphorus in the night sky. The whole hathpace was strictly arranged in accordance with the star image, and the astrologers stood around the brazier, like the companion stars of the Phosphorus. By doing so, they seemed to be a part of the starry sky.

Apart from the invaluable stargazing gears, cultivating qualified astrologers also required a long time.

Their eyes were the only thing which they could depend on to do their job well.

Therefore, one of the prerequisites to be a qualified astrologer was to protect their own eyes. Although Dispersion Star was 50 years old, his eyesight was still better than that of most young people in City of Dawn.

It was really not an easy thing at all.

After being selected as the astrologer apprentices, what they could see in the night was only the stars in the sky. Reading books under the oil lamp and candles was absolutely prohibited. In addition, they had to avoid strong sunlight, and they were not permitted to go out at high noon.

The corresponding changes would be made for meals. It was of primary significance to eat animal innards and eyes. What's more, fish and spice were prohibited. According to the knowledge of the former astrologers, eating bloody meals was beneficial for the eyes. The fish was the property of water and the spice was that of the earth. The former would damage the element of fire in the blood flow while the latter would induce blindness.

Dispersion Star had stuck to those dietary requirements for more than 40 years.

He believed that the span of an eyes life was limited.

In order to use his eyes to observe the stars for as long as possible, Dispersion Star seldom read books and stellar maps. But he did not need to because the constellation had been deeply engraved in his mind.

Astrologer of Dispersion Star directed his eyes to the telescopic sight, which was like a tiny pipe, standing behind the tail of the stout barrel.

Obviously, a flat inclined mirror was installed here to refract light into his eyes.

What an interesting and practical skill!

Although the astrologers understood this principle, they never thought to apply it to the stargazing gear.

It appeared that the application of this principle could largely improve the environment for observing the stars. At least, the astrologers did not have to bend over when observing the high constellations.

Given that the effect of the telescope delivered by His Majesty Roland was far better than that of the old-fashioned stargazing gear, what the Astrology Association needed to do was to recalculate the positions of the stars in the existing constellations and draw the stellar map once again. Since the arrival of these six astronomical telescopes, they had found tens of Dark Stars which were unobservable before.

Dispersion Star swept through the area that he was responsible for as per usual. The constellation would form different images as the seasons changed. It may be difficult for the beginners to comprehend, but for Dispersion Star, the brilliant rays of the constellation were as familiar as the wrinkles on his own face.

After finishing observing the first constellation, a ray of negligible light came into his eyes as he prepared to move the telescope.

For an instant, Astrologer of Dispersion Star felt his blood curdle.

Holding his breath, he focused his eyes in that direction.

That was not an illusion...

A dim glimmer of light hid between Hexagram and Blazing Star, looked as if the glimmer of light would extinguish at any time. However, what was different from the stars around it was obvious.

It was red.

# Chapter 602: Star Omen

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With his hands trembling, Astrologer of Dispersion Star thought it was not the right time to make the news public.

"When the scarlet star, or the Bloody Moon, befalls, the world will fall into a disaster beyond redemption."

He admittedly understood the meaning of this prophecy.

Taking a deep breath, the chief astrologer raised his head meticulously, for fear that the hard-won star would lose due to his unnecessary movement of touching the astrolabe.

Even though he could find the position of the star once again with his eyes closed.

"Write it down, East 3 Area, early summer, between Hexagram and Blazing Star."

"Yes," Yun replied, groping for his logbook, and then drew a circle at the corresponding position. That meant another star was included in the stellar map. "What's the name of the star ?" he asked.

"No name now."

"Master?" Yun startled slightly and said.

"Just do as what I've said, and there's no need to write the name down. Besides, gather the astrologers in the observatory and ask the apprentices to leave... right now!" Dispersion Star said.

His last sound sounded like a growl.

"I'll do it at once." Shocked by the growl of Dispersion Star, Yun ran to summon the other astrologers.

"May the deities in the heaven bless us!" Dispersion Star thought.

Soon, all the astrologers flocked together around the chief astrologer.

They seemed to realize something from his solemn look. The rumor about Star of Extinction was not a secret among the astrologers anymore since Roland had paid his visit to the Astrology Association. The young king had even suggested the chief astrologer show the patrimonial gold plaque to other astrologers, as it could enable them to feel responsibility and honor in their jobs and would encourage them to focus more on observing the stars. At that time, Dispersion Star somehow had felt that His Majesty had made light of the doomsday.

"Chief Astrologer... Do you?"

"I found a scarlet star," Dispersion Star nodded and said.

The astrologers all gasped out upon these words.

"But I'm not sure whether it's a light spot or just an illusion... Such a phenomenon is common in star observation, so..." Dispersion Star waved his hands and said.

"So you need us to re-check," Void Star said.

"That's right," Dispersion Star nodded and said, "and let's start with you."

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An hour later, eight astrologers completed the stars observation. To rule out the instrument problem, twice changes in telescopes and the one time change in the old-fashioned astrolabe were made.

All the astrologers had got a clear look at the dim light no matter which telescope was used, except the old-fashioned astrolabe.

Maybe a blurred vision or an illusion would occur to one people, but it was impossible that eight astrologers were all in blurred vision.

The Astrologer of Rose Star, one of the eight astrologers, whose eyesight was the most excellent, even claimed she had caught the sight of star profile.

There was no doubt about the existence of the "scarlet star".

Subsequently, a moment of unusual silence pervaded in the Astrological Station.

Was it the blessing or the punishment of the deities? It was a question. What Dispersion Star could make sure was that all their efforts, from the day they joined the Astrology Association, were aimed to find Star of Extinction, which heralded the misfortune and disaster. Yet when they really found it, a burst of fear struck them.

Their hard work was paid off. To know beforehand about the disaster could save tens of thousands of lives. It was the moment that the Astrology Association had totally outmatched the Alchemist Workshop. The significance of the event could not even be measured by the gold royals. Their warning, however, was also tantamount to the most vicious curse to some extent.

Doomsday prediction would be a profound responsibility for those astrologers.

"What should we do next?" Someone asked afterward.

"Under the normal circumstance, we should report it to the king."

"Do you mean Prince Roland Wimbledon? Will he believe us?"



"The star won't disappear even if he doesn't believe us."

"No! I mean he won't believe in the prediction on the Star of Extinction."

"Anyhow, it's worth a try. It was he, after all, who delivered these instruments to the Astrological Station. It was impossible that he would turn up his nose at our words."

"Who knows? He's famous for his stubbornness in King's City."

"He wouldn't leave us if he was as stubborn as he's said in rumors."

"Stop! Just keep the message about the scarlet star confidential, we still need some other days to observe." Dispersion Star raised his hands and interrupted the discussion.

After looking at each astrologer around, Dispersion Star said, "It's far from enough to only know about its existence. We need to learn about the scarlet star's operational orbit, speed and the possible time to befall the world. The more clues we can collect, the more convincing our prediction will be. Understand?"

"As you wish, Chief Astrologer," All the astrologers made bows together and said.

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Dispersion Star felt that the scarlet star was increasingly fathomless after one week's observation.

It should be motionless.

All the stars moved inevitably, which, sometimes, was in parallel with the skyline, and then raised in the mid-air; sometimes, they would fade away after midnight. Such changes were of regularity. Otherwise, the statement about the orbit could not hold water.

However, no signs of movement about Star of Extinction could be captured.

Hexagram tilted slightly in 7 days. As the autumn fell, the 6 transverse lines would change into 6 vertical lines, and the scarlet star would be moving away from the center between Hexagram and Blazing Star.

By contrast, Dispersion Star realized that the scarlet star did not move as if it was not a star but something fixed on the background of night.

Now that it could not move, it was impossible that the scarlet star would get close to the four kingdoms.

As the prediction revealed, Star of Extinction must befall into the world. In other words, the disaster would strike only when all the people could observe the star with their naked eyes. Did it mean

the doomsday would never fall if what engraved in the gold plaque was true?

Besides, the light of the scarlet star kept changing.

This conclusion was drawn by the Astrologer of Rose Star, whose logbook revealed that the star was brightening gradually.

When the Astrologer of Rose star had first noticed such a phenomenon, Dispersion Star had not taken it seriously given the stability of the stars. A star would not constantly change its shape and luster like the moon. In the seventh day, however, the Astrologer of Brightsky Star who had just recovered from illness had put forward the same idea. Given that the Astrologer of Rose Star and the Astrologer of Brightsky Star were of the most excellent eyesight among the astrologers of the Astrology Association, their points of view had finally caught Dispersion Star's attention.

After a heated discussion in the night, the whim of the Astrologer of Rose Star, a female stargazer, made all the astrologers shiver with fear.

"If the advent of Star of Extinction refers to being seen by the people, is there a possibility that the scarlet star will come into people's eyes even though it keeps motionless all the time? Will the increasingly brightening light make it surpass Phosphorus and become a torch hanging over the sky?"

Like a thundering roar, her remarks struck into Dispersion Star's

mind.

The ordinary people did not know how to identify the constellation, but that did not mean that they could not see the stars.

The brightness of some stars was a match for crescent, which could be easily seen on the night of the sunny day.

How about the star being of unique eye-catching color?

The answer was clear.

"I'll write a letter to His Majesty Roland now, hoping it's not too late," The chief astrologer said with cold sweat dripping.

# Chapter 603: Prelude to Battle

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Zero stood on the top floor of the Tower of Babel and peered down at the bustling Holy City of Hermes.

The number of church believers who came to the highland this year had doubled from the previous year, so had that of the new Judgement Army. The Kingdom of Everwinter alone supplied close to 20,000 people to the church. This allowed the manpower lost in the battles against demonic beasts and the Kingdom of Wolfheart to be quickly replenished. In fact, the numbers now exceeded that of before the war.

In a way, the only right decision that His Holiness O'Brien could make now was to unify the four kingdoms. Should Kingdom of Graycastle and Kingdom of Dawn fall into the hands of Holy City, the church would undoubtedly reach greater heights than ever before.

However, this was not enough for Zero. She felt that while the church would be more than capable of governing the secular kingdoms, it would still not be able to compare with the Union, which owned fertile plains.

The church will have to do more if it desires victory in the Battle of Divine Will.

"Isn't it supposed to be Isabella's turn?" Zero suddenly heard Tayfun's voice from behind her. She turned around and saw the three archbishops enter the hall.

"His Holiness has sent her to Kingdom of Dawn on a monitoring mission." She bowed slightly to pay her respects. "I'll be hosting the meeting in her place today."

"Is Supreme Pontiff really so busy?" El shrugged her shoulders. "No time to see us even?"

"Be careful with your attitude, El." Soli Daal frowned. "His Holiness has his own plans. You have no right to question him."

"I wasn't being serious."

"Considering his position, he's indeed very busy." Tayfun laughed. "When His Holiness O'Brien was still around, I often heard Mayne and Heather complain like this too."

"Indeed so." Zero beckoned to the three archbishops to follow her. Then she walked over to the small table in front of the window and said, "Let's hold the meeting here."

"Not in the secret chamber?"

"The church's situation is fantastic right now. Who would dare to eavesdrop on us and divulge what we say?" Zero replied calmly. "Even the most obstinate nobles know which side to pick."

"But there will always be people who like to go against the flow."

Although Tayfun did not really approve her explanation, he did not insist on going to the secret chamber. Neither did the other two seem to mind.

"Are you referring to the fourth Prince of Graycastle?"

"Who else could I be talking about?" The old man sat down, drank a mouthful of tea, and grumbled on. "Our attempts to surround the Western Region have failed. Not only the pure witches but also the priests, have all come to run back to Hermes. This is utterly absurd!"

"It was His Holiness who allowed them to return," Zero explained assuredly.

"You mean... Mayne?" Tayfun was surprised.

"When one step is slow, the other steps will be slow too." She nodded. "Ever since Silverstrip was killed at Fallen Dragon Ridge, we've fallen behind Roland Wimbledon. As we only received the news three months after it happened, it was obvious that it would be too late to send out reinforcements. So, there's no need to blame the pure witches. If they remained in Graycastle, they would have easily been targeted by Roland."

"Is there really no need to punish them? I would have liked to take this opportunity to hone Emma's temper." Soli raised his eyebrows. "She's always questioning my orders."

"That means your orders have a lot of errors and contradictions for sure." El quipped. "We all know that it's very difficult for a Judgement Warrior to use his brain."

Before Soli had the chance to retort, Zero quickly chimed in. "It would be beneficial for you to listen to her questions. As for how you discipline your pure, I shan't comment as long as you don't be too harsh on her. Every pure witch is a precious asset of the church."

"Yes, Lady Zero."

"However... why did Roland seize the God's Stones of Retaliation?" Tayfun mumbled. "Could it be because of Silverstrip and Storm that he detected the pure witches' presence?"

"Or, maybe, he knew long ago." Zero did not provide a definite answer. "We now know that he started recruiting witches very early on, and also built up relations with the people of Sleeping Island. Witches have all kinds of strange and powerful abilities, and thus it's not surprising if they found out information about the church."

"After seizing such a large amount of God's Stones, there's no sign of him putting them up for sale. This doesn't bode well."

"Nothing is certain." She thumped the table so as to gather everyone's attention. "This is the reason why His Holiness has asked you to come today. The intelligence agency of the Pivotal Secret Area has recently discovered that there have been unusual



patterns of grain purchases in Coldwind Ridge lately. Furthermore, the number of ships passing through the north of Redwater City is unprecedented. It's reported that at least one or two ships are sighted every day. Yet, our lookout in Silver City has not seen these ships sailing towards King's City or Sanwan River.

"..." The three archbishops looked at each other in puzzlement. "Where did those ships go?"

"The three of you have been busy reclaiming the war supplies deployed at Kingdom of Dawn. Hence it's perfectly normal if you haven't been paying attention to the situation in Kingdom of Graycastle," Zero said plainly. "After eliminating the east and west sides, there's only one place they can go—Deepvalley Town in the Northern Region. That place has the only tributary connected to Redwater River. It's also the nearest town to Coldwind Ridge in the north of Kingdom of Graycastle."

By tapping on the Queen of Clearwater's memory, she perfectly understood the distribution of cities and towns in Kingdom of Graycastle. "In other words, Roland Wimbledon is amassing his resources in the Northern Region. I don't have to tell you what he wants to do."

None of the three archbishops were fools, and they quickly understood what Zero meant. However, understanding and believing were two different things. "Wait a minute, do you really think Roland is intending to invade Hermes?"

"It's not what I think. It's what the intelligence agency concluded from its analysis, and His Holiness has agreed with this conjecture.

It's understandable that Roland is feeling confident after his victory in King's City and thinks he can do the same in Hermes. While it's true that his snow power weapons are far superior to Timothy's weapons, we aren't ill-prepared. That's why His Holiness has permitted the church's personnel in Kingdom of Graycastle to retreat temporarily." Zero shrugged her shoulders. "The nobles there are completely unable to prevent him from clearing out all of the churches in his territory now that he's ready to publicly declare us his enemy."

"He's mad!" Soli muttered under his breath.

"The entire Wimbledon family is a bunch of lunatics." El swallowed her saliva. "Garcia was like that, now Roland's like that."

"This information is of great significance. We should further confirm it." Tayfun said, and meditated for a moment before he continued, "How about I send my pure witches to Coldwind Ridge to find out more?"

"There's no need for that." Zero shot down his suggestion. "We'll invade Graycastle sooner or later, so it actually saves us trouble that Roland is gathering his troops. This way, we don't have to attack city after city, like what happened in Kingdom of Wolfheart. We just have to defeat Roland and the war will be over." She glanced toward Tayfun. "How long more will the preparation of supplies take?"

The old bishop answered in a deep voice, "Around two weeks."

"How if we dispatch an advance force of roughly 1,000 men? Together with 300 God's Punishment Army soldiers."

"We can dispatch a force of this size tomorrow."

"Great." Zero got off her seat. "Rather than wait for Roland to trouble us, it's better that we target and seize Coldwind Ridge preemptively. Isn't he amassing grains over there? Perhaps we could even make up for our loss of God's Stones. Soli Daal, you shall be in charge of this advance force. I want you to take down Coldwind Ridge within three days."

However, she did not receive an immediate reply.

The three archbishops seemed to ponder for a moment before Tayfun asked, "Is this your idea or His Holiness Mayne's?"

"..." Zero suddenly felt a surge of anger well up in her heart. "These idiots." As the true heir recognized by O'Brien, and the legitimate successor of the Union, she felt insulted to be doubted by a few mortals. She did her best to suppress her anger and pretended to be unconcerned. Laughing, she replied, "Of course it's His Holiness' decision. You may ask him personally if you have any questions. But, there's a lot of work to be done in the Pivotal Secret Area. Unless there's something truly important, it's best that you don't disturb his work there."

"Yes, we humbly abide by His Holiness' wishes." The three archbishops placed their hands on their hearts and declared.

# Chapter 604: Anna's Determination

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Lightning flew into the castle's office and passed the last bird's eye view map of the snow mountain to Roland.

"You've worked hard." Roland caressed the young girl's forehead. "Do you have any new discoveries?"

"There was only snow and more snow." She closed her eyes and enjoyed the feeling. "Don't talk about demons and beasts, I didn't even see any large animals."

"Is that so? Looks like I imagined too much." Roland took out the previous maps and examined them together thoroughly—although they were only drawn in sketch form, and were not as detailed and accurate as Soraya's "photographs", he could at least make out a full view of the snow mountain.

The body of the mountain was extremely large, and its height was approximately 4,000 meters. Standing on the mountaintop, one could clearly see the sea of clouds. The mountain peak was not as steep and sharp as Roland expected. Instead, it was a vast and flat area, and the middle portion was slightly concave, like a huge volcanic crater. The only difference was that the concave portion was filled with a frozen lake, whose entire surface resembled a spotless mirror. According to Lightning, she could see flowing water beneath the thick layers of ice.

"What did you imagine there would be at the peak?"

"Ruins, blackstone pagodas, remains of a town... these won't be surprising." Roland laughed. "I find it more surprising that it's completely bare." He pointed at the newly-drawn map. "Is this the source of Redwater River?"

"Yes." Lightning turned her head and took one look at the map. "It's within the clouds. If it wasn't for the sound of rushing water, I wouldn't have noticed it. There are many cracks on the mountain's body, some of which are amazingly large. Their widths could be two to three hundred meters long. When near, the sound of falling water is comparable to that of thunder."

"Did you attempt to enter these cracks?"

"Uh..."

"Be honest."

"I did try, but I couldn't." The young girl pouted her mouth. "The cracks were surely big enough, and their heights were sufficient to accommodate half a castle. The problem was that the mist created by the rapids was too dense and thus I couldn't see anything. It was also accompanied by strong winds which pushed me back very quickly."

"Don't try something so dangerous in the future." Roland glowered at her. "Do you remember what you promised me?"

"I promised to ask for your permission before doing any kind of exploration." Lightning drooped her head low.

"That's right. I'll forgo the homework punishment this time. Go play with Maggie."

"Aye... how about the snow mountain?"

"We'll halt the work for now." He stacked the maps neatly and kept them in a drawer. "We shall wait until Sylvie returns before we talk about deeper explorations. I have to place my focus on the war with the church."

"Alright." Lightning nodded and flew out of the window.

"What do you think?" Roland looked behind him.

"I'm here, Your Majesty." Nightingale appeared on top of the desk, where she sat cross-legged. "The snow mountain is freezing cold. Who would choose to set up a camp in that kind of place?"

As she was not wearing shoes, Roland could not help taking a few more looks at her feet, which were cutely wrapped in white socks. "Eh... do you also think that the Megamouth Beasts are hiding within the snow mountain?"

"It's only a guess. If they are as skillful at burrowing as we

believe, it won't be difficult for them to build dens in the mountain's body, and furthermore..." Nightingale seemed a little hesitant.

"What?"

"I was wondering, could there be a connection between them and the holes in the Impassable Mountain Range?"

...

Roland continued to ponder over Nightingale's words until it was night time. No matter how he looked at it, it was a truly terrifying conjecture.

If these bunches of scary monsters are everywhere and aren't restricted by natural barriers, how am I going to destroy them?

Something else puzzled him greatly. "If the Megamouth Beasts could reach the edge of Land of Dawn, then there should be signs of their activity in the fertile plains. Why didn't the Union leave any records of them?"

Unfortunately, the present situation prevented him from pursuing further exploration. The church had to be completely defeated for City of Neverwinter to have a future to speak of.

After more than a month of shipping, he had already transported close to 4,000 soldiers to the Northern Region, together with a

corresponding amount of military supplies and rations. According to intelligence from the frontline, the field defense lines were being established according to plan, while the routes from Coldwind Ridge to the interior of the kingdom had all been cut off by the First Army. Soon, the final batch of soldiers would be setting off. Roland would be following them to the Northern Region to command this war, in which failure was not an option.

Right at this moment, he heard someone knock on the bedroom door.

Roland opened the door and discovered that it was Anna who was standing outside.

"I've seen Wendy's expedition roster, and my name isn't on it." She walked into the room with no trace of emotion on her face. "Pardon me, but I can't accept that, Your Majesty."

Had Anna stormed angrily into the room and started an argument with him, Roland would have known what to do. Instead, Anna's expression made him feel a little afraid. It was as though she had already made up her mind on something, and life and death did not matter to her anymore. Ever since he rescued her from jail, he had not seen her look this way in front of him.

Roland pulled her to take a seat at the bedside. After a long period of silence, he finally spoke, "I understand how you feel. However, the military production in the Border Area needs you. Whether it be the components of the heavy machine gun or the fuzes of the howitzer, your processing skills are required... and these are crucial to our victory."



"Not because the frontline is dangerous?"

"Although there's a definite amount of danger while fighting against the church, we'll definitely emerge victorious. So, you don't have to worry too much... It's a more appropriate choice for you to remain here."

He did not attempt to persuade Anna based on the perspective of war safety, as her expression had already made clear her attitude. The only way to convince someone as conscientious as her was to draw upon higher-level reasons, such as explaining to her how the military production played a key part in the outcome of the war.

"If that's the case, I can do the processing in Deepvalley Town as well." Anna remained unmoved nevertheless. "There's iron and copper production in the Northern Region too. I'm sure Miss Edith won't be stingy with their ores. Lucia has also agreed to follow me, and thus the refining won't be a problem. As for the issue of transportation, while the ships had to transport complete weapons initially, they only have to transport parts now, and the assembly can be done in the Northern Region. This will only increase our efficiency." Anna's reply was clear and irrefutable. It was obvious that she came prepared for this.

Roland was at a loss for words.

"Your Majesty, I can't accept being separated from you at a time like this." She reached out her hands and clasped his cheeks. "This is different from our separations in the past. You know clearer

than anyone that the war with the church is the biggest challenge you've ever faced. Either Hermes gets completely destroyed, or the First Army perishes. I'll never avoid what I need to do or deceive myself. If you lose, there's a chance I'll never see you again. Furthermore, if I wait in City of Neverwinter, I'll only hear the news two or three months after anything happens. I don't want to wait in torment for such a long time only to bid farewell in the end."

# Chapter 605: Exchanging Promises

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What followed was a long period of silence.

Anna's eyes were not as tranquil as Roland had thought. As the couple gazed silently at each other, he saw the surging undercurrent beneath the cerulean surfaces. It was comprised of anxiety, fear, but above all, resolve. This was the reason why her expression was always looked so steely.

As time slid away quietly, the feeling became more and more intense.

Roland finally realized that he was not going to change her mind.

He closed his eyes and exhaled a long sigh.

"Alright, but you must agree to one request."

"Say it."

"You must never go on the frontline. You'll always remain in the rear."

"Promised."

"If something happens on the battlefield..." Roland wet his lips.  
"I'm saying, in case, I..."

"If something like that really happens, I'll leave the Northern Region immediately," Anna said without reserve.

Roland seemed stunned for a moment.

"Are you worried that I'll try to avenge you and end up giving away my life needlessly?" She stroked his cheeks gently. "Only Nightingale and Ashes would do something like that. As for myself, I'll return quickly to the Western Region, bring all of your loyalists to Sleeping Island and settle down there, while continuing to resist Holy City. Your Majesty, although I'd like to follow you into death, I know that you'll never be agreeable to that." As she talked about this, she paused for a moment before continuing, "I promise you that I'll walk your path for you until your ideal world becomes reality, where witches and normal people can live together freely."

Roland did not respond—there was no need to. Anna's growth had exceeded his expectations. This was already the best reward he attained for coming to this world.

She reached out her hands to unbutton Roland's shirt.

Nothing else needed to be said.

The couple kissed as they flipped onto the bed.

Blackfire pulled down the curtains, while clothes and blankets were tossed to one side. In this moment, Roland's and Anna's fates

were firmly connected, with the stars in the sky serving witness.

...

Two days later, Roland delivered his final speech before setting off in the square.

The people who came after hearing the news crowded the square until it was almost watertight. After a year and a half of development, Border Town of old no longer existed and was replaced by the prosperous and bustling City of Neverwinter. This had brought about massive changes to the lives of the people. This also meant that Roland's reputation and popularity scaled to unprecedented heights.

"Good morning, my subjects." As he went on stage, cheers rained down on him overwhelmingly.

"Long live our king!"

"Long live Your Majesty Roland!"

The people needed neither encouragement nor echoes to boost their volume. They consciously and enthusiastically cheered with respect for their king and waved their hands in the air.

The furore only gradually subsided after a full seven minutes.

"All of you should already know." Roland looked around at the countless pairs of revering eyes below the stage, and spoke in a deep voice, "Our kingdom is about to fight a war of self-defense against an invader. The enemy is none other than the Holy City of Hermes, which has already annexed Kingdom of Everwinter and Kingdom of Wolfheart! Today, of the four kingdoms, only Kingdom of Graycastle and Kingdom of Dawn remain. Right now, they're targeting us!"

"I know that some of you used to believe in God and the church. There's nothing shameful about that! Your kindnesses were made use of and your hopes were cheated. Do you think I'll blame the victims instead of the liars and robbers? Of course not!" He raised his fist. "The church shall have to pay! Just by selling the God's Stones of Retaliation, they're able to make more than 100,000 gold royals per year—this money should belong to all of you!"

"Why? The reason is simple. The nobles were unwilling to fork out an extra sum of money to buy the God's Stones, and therefore this portion of expenses was transferred onto you through tax increases, property confiscation, and daylight robbery! And it's not only the God's Stones, but also the building of churches, the maintenance of resident priests and the holding of baptism ceremonies. I believe that none of you are unfamiliar with these things!"

The things that the masses most easily understood and hated were exploitation and oppression. The church's methods were not as flagrant as the nobles', but in the eyes of the highly-experienced Roland, it was not difficult at all to lay bare this thin layer of fig leaf while at the same time smearing the name of the church.

"The church promised that this sum of money would be exchanged for God's blessings, but what happened in the end? Before I came to this town, the people had little to eat and wear, and as such, famine and severe cold came during the Months of Demons every year and took away the lives of many. As for those who survived... Is it really because of the church's or God's aid? No, they did nothing!" Roland raised his voice a notch. "The only thing they're interested in is sucking your blood dry!"

The natives saw these things happening with their own eyes, while most of the refugees from other cities had similar experiences. The square erupted into an angry uproar as everyone attributed all of their past sufferings to the church.

"So, I'll never surrender, and more importantly, I won't lose to these bloodsuckers!" Roland waved his fist in the air and declared loudly. "The First Army will pulverize them so that nobody will dare to rob my subjects ever again. You won't ever have to worry about paying money to build churches or to 'atone for your sins'! These bullsh\*t taxes won't exist in the new Kingdom of Graycastle!"

"Facts have proven that without the presence of the church, City of Neverwinter will become an even better place, and so will the other cities!"

"Everything that you have has been created by your own hands and your spirit, not those illusory things. That's why I have repeatedly emphasized the glory of labor! Only labor can create wealth, and you people are the most glorious of laborers. You should be proud of this. Without you, there won't be today's

prosperous City of Neverwinter!"

He pressed his hands down as a gesture for the subjects to pause their cheers. "The First Army has set off for the Northern Region, and they'll be fighting against the church. If we're defeated, we'll lose everything that we own and return back to the impoverished times of old... Tell me, are you willing to return to the past?"

The answers he received were self-evident.

"No, Your Majesty, we'll fight the church until the end!"

"Kill all of them!"

"Chase them out of our kingdom!"

"I'll protect Your Majesty with my life!"

There were all kinds of responses, but their expressions were impressively identical—they were willing and ready to defend everything that they had that was hard-earned.

"Well said. I don't need you to engage the enemy in battle. That's the responsibility of the First Army. Neither do you have to pay extra taxes to support the war—that's what the enemy does to its people. All you have to do is to continue living your lives, and continue to participate in the construction and production of this city. This would be the greatest aid your kin fighting on the frontline can receive from you." Roland placed his right hand on



his chest and saluted. "We must attain victory! Long live the Kingdom of Graycastle!"

"For victory!"

"Long live this kingdom!"

The people repeatedly chanted these two phrases, even long after Roland had made his departure.

In the afternoon the same day, the last batch of soldiers boarded the paddle steamers. "The Roland", serving as the flagship, tooted to signal the beginning of the journey.

The destination was Deepvalley Town!

# Chapter 606: Father and Daughter

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Edith had already waited in the hall when Duke Calvin walked into the Castle of Jadeforest.

"My dear daughter..."

She interrupted him ruthlessly. "Why are you so late? I wrote to you a month ago, telling you to cooperate with the First Army in assembling and war preparation. We need to meet all their requirements as much as we can."

"Yes, I notified Earl Haier in Deepvalley Town immediately, and then sent our butler to supervise the matter. Isn't it enough?" the duke said with his open arms poised in mid-air.

"Of course," folding her arms across her chest, Edith said disagreeably, "it can show our sincerity better if you come here in person. Besides, the war against the church is very important. We can't take it more seriously."

"But after all it's Earl Haier's domain..."

"Come on father, the nobles are going to disappear, and you're still fussy about the issues of domains and feudatory. I thought you'll be more decisive after the rebellion of Hawes and Lista families."

Duke Calvin was embarrassed and said, "I thought my daughter

would at least give me a hug and say she missed me, instead of talking about the business before we sit down."

"Really?" Edith laughed. "So you didn't lose your temper in the study, calling me a bastard, and said I was an ungrateful bastard who bit the hand that fed her. If I'm right, you must want to smash something but stopped because it's too expensive."

The duke choked. "I..."

"Damn it, who told her?" thought the duke.

Before he figured out how to respond, Edith had already walked toward him and wrapped around him with her arms. "Welcome to Deepvalley Town, father. Satisfied?"

His anger dissipated instantly. A mixed feeling struck him when he stroked his daughter's hair.

Sometimes he just did not know how Edith became such a talented, beautiful lady today. She was his first wife's daughter, but Edith's personality was quite different from her biological mother's and his. He almost doubted if Edith was his own daughter if it was not the resemblance she bore to his late wife.

When they hugged, however, the duke again felt that they were related by blood. She was still the Pearl of the Northern Region who was raised by himself.

After a while, Edith dreadfully pushed him away, saying, "You stink. I suggest you should go to get a shower first. I bring some scented soaps from City of Neverwinter. Try one. It's better than cassias."

"There's no hurry about that." Calvin looked around. "Right, where's Earl Haier. Why didn't he greet me in the hall?"

"I told him to go back to his mansion in the suburb."

"What?" The duke looked at his daughter in shock.

Edith shrugged and said, "He cares nothing about His Majesty's will or your orders. If I didn't arrive there in time, he might have pissed the advanced troops off. Not everyone can see clearly their present situation. Some of them may not even have the nerve to open their eyes or minds. For them, I won't waste a second. The wiser option is to drive him away."

"But he just handed over the castle and towns obediently?"

"Of course not, but I have the First Army." She smiled. "And it conquered King's City in one day, so what do you think a dozen of knights can do about them?"

"I don't know whether it's an illusion or not, Edith has changed a lot in the last two months. Her smile is more sincere, not the kind of the noble's fake smile which she puts on in public. And there's a glow in her eyes, which I haven't seen it for many years since she

grew up," Calvin thought.

He realized that she loved her life now. At least she was happier here than in the Northern Region.

The change made him a little envious, accompanied with complicated feelings.

Maybe just like what his daughter had said, they did lose some of their rights after being deprived of their status as nobles, but it also freed them from their territories.

Now there was a great future in front of her. She could go to places other than the Northern Region and experience a different life.

After returning to the study, Calvin drank up two cups of black tea and let out his breath. "So now we should stay here and wait for His Majesty?"

Edith opened her notebook and said, "Not exactly, there's a lot we need to do. We need to deliver all the materials, such as food, horses, fabrics, herbs and all other necessities for the war to Deepvalley Town. And I received a new ciphered letter from His Majesty. He said the iron ingots and copper ingots have to be delivered here too. The more, the better."

"So he wants to loot the whole Northern Region," the Duke thought secretly. "Do you really believe His Majesty Roland can

beat the church?"

"He may not be able to attack Holy City of Hermes and eradicate the church totally. But it's not a big deal for him to stop the church entering the kingdom from Coldwind Ridge." She paused for a while. "What His Majesty needs most is time now."

"Time?"

"You haven't seen his factory, so you don't understand how powerful City of Neverwinter is," Edith looked at her father and said, "and no matter who you are, a knight, a mercenary, the Judgement Army or a fervent believer, everybody shows no difference in front of bullets. Factories keep producing these bullets. Besides, it only takes a few minutes to teach a citizen how to use firearms and bullets to kill enemies. After one month's training, they can become a soldier and go to the battlefield to kill enemies. And three months, they'll become the indestructible First Army."

"What... is your point?"

"Father, the production speed of bullets is much faster than the growth rate of human beings. It's different from swords and armors. A blacksmith with ten apprentices can make ten suits of armors, 30 swords in one year. But one factory can produce thousands of bullets in one day. After killing the knights armed with swords, they can give the extra bullets to those who want to be a knight. The next day, these bullets can be sent to citizens; One month later, the amounts of the bullets can turn this city into a ghost town.

Calvin opened his mouth but did not know what to say.

"It's normal that you don't believe me. After all, these things may sound a little absurd. But I saw how they deal with their enemies with my own eyes when I participated in the First Army's Tooth Extraction Campaign," Edith said slowly, "so His Majesty will win sooner or later as long as the First Army can hold the defensive line. Three months later, City of Neverwinter will train a new army and produce the weapons they need. But the new Judgement Army may not be able to learn how to hold their sword in such a short time."

"..." After a little while of silence, the duke opened his hands and said, "Well, I'll believe what you said. But why do you not reply to my letters if you have such a good view towards His Majesty? I mean... to marry him."

# Chapter 607: Lighting the Beacon

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Besides giving Roland Wimbleton a formal reply, the duke also sent a private letter to Edith which embodied his ideas enthusiastically. Since Roland had yet to marry, if her daughter could marry Roland, it would bring him peace of mind.

There was no true love in a political marriage, or at least it did not play the main role in such marriages. The Pearl of the Northern Region knew this clearly. The duke believed this was a great opportunity, especially when all of the territories of the nobles would be taken back later, which meant the king would be the only noble in Kingdom of Graycastle. His queen's position would be extraordinary.

Calvin believed his daughter could understand him.

However, neither His Majesty nor Edith replied to him.

"Don't tell me it's because you don't like him," the duke poured himself the third cup of black tea and said, "I haven't seen you like anyone before, and it doesn't matter... You considered marrying Timothy, why can't you consider marrying Roland?"

"No, it's different, father."

"What's the difference? Aren't they both kings?"

Edith closed her notebook and said, "No, Timothy needed a



reliable ally or subordinate in the Northern Region. The only way to ensure that was marriage. If I said no, he would kick the Kant family out and find another more obedient family. In other words, our family's position would be untenable if I could not be the queen. There would have been nothing we could do. So I have to drag this marriage in case... If Roland and his Western Region fail... I would play my role marrying Timothy. But if Roland wins, I don't need to marry him."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Roland chose me only because I'm capable, not because of my family, territory or wealth. All those things that're behind me aren't important in his eyes." His daughter stroked her hair. "Since the noble and rules won't exist anymore, why should I obey those old regulations?"

"You know," She continued talking, "few officers who help him manage City Hall in City of Neverwinter come from noble families. They're all common people who took the jobs after several rounds of examination. I have to admit they act badly in many ways, but when it comes to their own work, they don't lose to any noble."

"This is His Majesty's new rule. You don't need to worry about losing your position as long as you complete the work assigned by him. So you should get rid of the old rules as soon as possible, and get used to the new policy which is issued by City Hall so as that you won't hold me back."

"Even so, you could still be the queen. It's harmless to you." The duke did not want to give up, saying, "You could show him how

capable you are and give birth to a prince... so the Kant family would be his inseparable ally. Your brother's future would be secured too."

"I..." Edith hesitated for a while. "I'm afraid I can't do that."

"Why?"

"His Majesty Roland... he seems to believe in love."

"So he already has someone in mind?" The duke winced.

"Yes, a witch."

"What?" He did not believe what he had heard and wondered if his hearing was playing up.

"Scroll said His Majesty Roland will marry a witch." Edith confessed. "Scroll is also a witch who works as a Minister of Education in City Hall."

"So it's a political marriage?" Calvin could only think of this answer. "But it's too absurd. Witches can't have children."

"It's not a political marriage. He only wants to marry her because he loves her." She leaned back in her chair and played with the quill in her hand. "Yes, love plays a big role in this upcoming marriage. This may sound impossible, but after one month's

contact with him, somehow I just believe what he said."

"Why?"

"You'll understand when you see him. Among all of the noble that I have seen, he's the most unlike one," his daughter said with a little smile that twitched upon her lips.

"What about the heirs?"

"They'll find a way to solve this problem." Edith shook her head. "But it's not our concern. We shouldn't get involved in this."

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Iron Axe was patrolling in the criss-cross trenches with a group of officer corps.

The primary use of these trenches was to evade thrower attacks and other ranged attacks from enemies. According to His Majesty's orders, the trench was divided into several paths. The distance between each path was 20 to 30 meters and longitudinal grooves interconnected the cross trenches so the soldiers could walk forward and backward. There were wood piles and barbed wire on the surface, preventing the enemies from conquering this place quickly. Machine gun castle was located on both sides of the battlefield. There was a low bunker in the front with a tall tower at the back, forming a well-proportioned firing network.

Behind the trench, was the artillery position. There were 50 field artilleries standing side by side. Going back, it was the shooting area for the 152mm Longsong Cannons.

To ensure the project schedule, Iron Axe specially applied to His Majesty for Maggie's express transportation and sent Lotus to Deepvalley Town in advance.

Just seeing the layout of the battlefield, the First Army's Commander Iron Axe felt victory was in sight.

This group of people walked to the end of the battlefield, gazing out over the tan-colored mountains far away.

This place was located at the foot of the Impassable Mountain Range's Big Gap, which was also the only way to go down the mountain. They could see the steep Impassable Mountain Range less than one meter ahead.

Coldwind Ridge just stood on the hillside.

Its strategic significance, same as Border Town, was to supervise Hermes. Once the signal fire was lit in the town, many of the villages in the Northern Region and the nearest Deepvalley Town would see the warning.

It was a day and a half's march from Coldwind Ridge to the ambush place, so the First Army had plenty of time to prepare themselves for confronting the enemy.

"Can't we just evacuate all the citizens in Coldwind Ridge in advance?" Brian who followed him to check the battlefield just could not help asking, "Holy City may turn them into the first batch of enchanted people to charge the front."

"If we do so, it'll alert our enemies that we've set a trap here. We can't take this risk before we finish the layout of the battlefields," Iron Axe said with little emotion, "Coldwind Ridge could only act as a bait rather than the main battlefield for it's too close to Holy City."

"Besides, no one would believe us," Van'er added, "You see, if someone run to the village and told those locals 'the war is going to begin, you should get out of this place as soon as possible, and please go to the foot of the mountain'... Who would believe him? Unless we force them to leave. But then Holy City would know our true intention if we did so."

Brian signed. "I know that, but..."

"Don't worry. We can finish our work here within three days," Iron Axe said in a low voice, "and then we can tell people to evacuate. According to the spy's information, the Holy City's large forces are still stationed in the campsite, so we still have enough time to evacuate the citizens."

"I hope so..." Brian said with his eyes widened abruptly, "Wait. What's that?"

Iron Axe's heart sank slightly while seeing the mountains far away from that Brian's eyes were fixed on.

A wisp of smoke rose from the back of the mountain, a black line against the gray cloudy sky.

# Chapter 608: Coldwind Ridge

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Soli Daal satisfactorily went through the broken castle gate and entered the castle of Coldwind Town.

Just three days to take Coldwind Ridge? Apart from the two days he spent on the road, it only took him several minutes to break through the little town's city wall. Of course, that muddy fence could hardly be called a city wall. The few guards just fled without making any official resistance after two of them were slashed by the Judgement Army and fell to the ground.

Is this the town guarding the border area?

Kingdom of Graycastle is nothing more powerful than that.

The only thing that upset him was when the church army was only halfway down the mountain, smoke came out of the Beacon Tower below as if they had known the church army was coming to attack the town.

Although sooner or later residents in the other domains of the Northern Region would be alerted, what made Soli angry was the disrespect the townsmen held toward the church—they had treated the army from Holy City as enemies beforehand, which showed their long-held sacrilege. Soli dispatched a squad of Judgement Army to head to the Beacon Tower, in order to arrest some soldiers for interrogation before hanging them.

"This way please, my lord." The knight leading the way said in a trembling voice. With swords putting on their necks, those knights did not show any courage, nor did they try to protect their lord. Instead, they instantly knelt down and pledged alliance to the church.

Those soldiers without a belief are just ugly, weak, and hapless. They're nothing compared with the Judgement Warriors who fight for the deities.

After killing several guards on the way, the Judgement Army broke into the study of the Lord of Coldwind Ridge and sealed every window which might serve as an exit, although Soli did not think the lord had the courage to escape through a window at all. Soli slowly walked into the study, looking at the lord gradually slump on a chair with a pale face.

"Good afternoon, Lord Kevan Matten."

"How, how dare you break into Coldwind Ridge... Does Holy City want to make enemy with Kingdom of Graycastle openly?"

"He's done," Soli thought, "Fear has completely possessed him." Through the decades of defending against demonic beasts at Hermes, the archbishop had developed a unique ability, which was to relish fear. Some people could convert fear into the desire of survival, while others would only be devoured by fear. Converting fear into the desire of survival was regarded as the essential quality for a Judgement Warrior to be promoted to a member of the God's



Punishment Army. Those who were devoured by fear would be eventually obsolete in the endless atrocious wars.

Kevan was obviously among the latter.

"That's right. Haven't you known it long before?"

"What? No! I don't know what you mean..."

"It's too late to regret, my lord." Soli interrupted him. "You offered high prices for grains and forbade merchants to go to Holy City. Don't tell me you did that on a whim. The King of Graycastle wants to turn Coldwind Ridge into an outpost for the war against Holy City. So, naturally, you can't blame us for an early counterattack."

"This is a groundless accusation." Kevan shook his head repeatedly. "I didn't do any of what you accused me of. The king has never sent ambassadors to Coldwind Ridge, not to mention to launch an attack against Hermes!"

"It's OK that you don't admit. Supreme Pontiff has his method to find out the information he wants in your head. It'll do you no good if things have to go that far. So, you'd better tell me everything you know now."

"I, I really didn't do that. You can't wrongfully accuse me." He shrunk his obese body a bit and said, "I'm the Lord of Coldwind Ridge, an Earl of Kingdom of Graycastle! What you did has violated

the 'Agreement on the Months of the Demons'!"

"Enough. You deserve it."

Soli Daal waved his hand in dread. The Judgement Warriors immediately dragged Kevan out of the study.

After the archbishop sat on the lord's chair, he vaguely felt something was wrong. "The lord has obviously been destructed by fear, why did he refuse to confess? Is he so loyal to Roland Wimbledon that he would rather be interrogated in Holy City than disclose the king's plan?"

At that moment, a chief justice went into the room. "Milord Bishop, Pitsos has sealed the granary, but..."

"But what?"

"There isn't much food there, probably only enough to last the townsmen for one or two months. There is no way it could sustain a large army."

"Are you sure?" Soli frowned immediately.

"Pitsos searched every corner of the granary and asked the keepers. They said recently there was not a large amount of grain coming in and the wheat there was just the stock from last year," The chief justice reported in full detail.

"Why was there news about offering high prices for grains in the town?" Soli meditated for a while. "Go ask the merchants."

"Yes." The chief justice nodded. "Besides, we did a thorough search of the garrison camps in the west of the town. Most of the rooms there are empty. The surrendered knights said since the border army was completely annihilated at Hermes, no new soldiers have been recruited."

"That means Coldwind Ridge isn't ready for a war, which contradicts the information that Zero supplied." The archbishop's brows deepened. After a long silence, he ordered. "There must be believers of the church in this town. Call them together and ask about the changes in Coldwind Ridge in the last two months in detail. Question the local Rats and those who voluntarily submitted to the church. I want to know what's going on as soon as possible!"

The chief justice bowed and said, "I'll go ask them right away."

Soli leaned back on the chair and deeply sighed. The plan of attacking Kingdom of Graycastle had been made a long time ago. The process and the result did not matter, but yet he did not like any accidents.

What went wrong?

The next day, the chief justice put a report on the archbishop's desk, which was full of information he collected.

Soli opened it and went through the testimonies on the first page. "Two local merchants offered high prices for grains. Did they hoard wheat as much as 5,000 pecks?"

"That's only the two merchants' testimony." The chief justice said in a low voice. "After getting the information, I searched their houses right away. I did find a large quantity of grain, but it sufficed to requirement of only one person. In their basements, there are merely 100 pecks of grain in total. Besides, there was no one in their houses. I guess all fled after they saw the beacon fire."

"Do you mean... collusion?" Soli immediately got what he meant.

"Yes, my lord. Only when they collude with the peddlers outside the town, pretend to sell grains to those pedlers then secretly transport the grains back, could they create such a false image."

"Where do these pedlers come from?"

"From all the other towns in the Northern Region, such as Deepvalley Town, City of Evernight, Wuthering Castle... The purchase at high prices started a month ago. At first, not many people paid attention to it. Later on, the trade volume increased so much that it drew merchants' attention. We've put all the pedlers in the town into custody, but failed to find those who were in charge of transporting the grains."

If they're in collusion, there is a small chance of capturing them. Yet... what did they do this for? Just to draw the attention of Holy

City to make Supreme Pontiff attack at an earlier date?

Soli skipped to the last few pages of the report, and then a piece of information caught his eyes.

"Are the patrollers on the Beacon Tower... dead?"

# Chapter 609: Entering the Battlefield

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"All three died in a shack at the foot of the Beacon Tower," The chief justice nodded and said, "and the guards on the Beacon Tower take their shifts once a week. So when they were found dead, their bodies had become stinky."

"Alright. It seems it was not them that kindled the beacon, but some others." Soli punched the desk angrily, and then burst into laughter. "Are they deliberately teasing us or provoking Holy City to wage a war?"

"The specific reason is not clear. But Milord, one Rat's testimony is interesting." The chief justice pointed to the report. "I deliberately wrote it on the last page."

Soli turned the report to the last page and hastily skimmed through it. "Two weeks ago, people set a barrier on the road beneath Coldwind Ridge, forbidding anyone to go to the Impassable Mountain Range, but allowing people to leave there?"

"Exactly. The Rat had planned to take his chance in Deepvalley Town, but he saw some merchants who should have headed for Hermes were stopped by soldiers."

"It seems the lord really didn't do this," Soli thought. "Wait a moment... two weeks ago? When was the last time the group of pedlers who sold grain appeared?"

"Three days ago."

The archbishop's face instantly clouded over. "That's to say, those pedlers were allowed to pass the Impassable Mountain Range which was alleged to be inaccessible?"

The answer was clear as daylight.

"They're accomplices," the chief justice said, "at least they look like so."

"How many were guarding the barrier?"

"The Rat only dared to take a quick glance from afar. He estimated there were several hundreds of them."

"As long as we spot their weak point, we're fine," Soli Daal stood up and said, "Order the Judgement Army to gather here right away!"

"Milord, do you intend to go down the hill?" The chief justice was surprised, but he quickly explained. "Supreme Pontiff ordered us to station in Coldwind Ridge after seizing it, to ensure the road is clear and wait for the main army to come... If you want to inquire more about the situation, ask a small detachment to capture a few enemies for interrogation. That'll be sufficient."

"Not only will I catch a few of them for interrogation, but I'll also crush their barrier. This is the price they have to pay for making fun of Holy City." Soli waved hand impatiently. "If we start off

now, by the day after tomorrow I'll be able to see their heads overhung above the city gate. This won't affect the Holy City's attacking plan, so His Holiness won't blame us."

"But if this is a trap the enemy set..."

"A trap?" Soli glanced at him. "I used to lead an army and attack Broken Tooth Castle of Kingdom of Wolfheart. It was a very tough battle. They took advantage of the geography and set up numerous traps. However, traps set up by commoners could only bring limited trouble to God's Punishment Army. So, what a trap set up in the open field at the foot of a mountain can do to us? Any attempt to ambush God's Punishment Army will be in vain. On the other hand, I kind of hope they have the courage to fight instead of fleeing." The archbishop paused, and then said, "Now you've understood it. Go and do what I ordered."

"... Yes, Milord!"

Looking at the back of the chief justice, Soli Daal sneered. "I'll never pardon these blasphemers."

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"Is there a large troop taking off from Coldwind Ridge?" Iron Axe asked, looking at the fluffy pigeon which just flew into the tent.

"Around 1,000 soldiers, coo!" Maggie said while flapping her wings, "and there are no vehicles shipping grains or a militia.



They're all armored. Some of them are carrying big shields and short spears, cool!"

"Big shields?" Iron Axe said in surprise, "How big are they?"

"Um..." Maggie looked at Iron Axe while tilting her head. "About the same size as yours, coo."

"I see. Well done." Iron Axe handed over the pigeon a piece of dried meat as usual, and then called for the guard who was standing outside of the door. "Ask Gun Battalion commander Brian and Artillery Battalion commander Van'er to come to my tent for a meeting. The enemy is in action."

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After hearing the information provided by the witches, Brian could not help frowning. "How can they come so soon? It takes two to three days for His Majesty to reach Deepvalley Town. The Longsong Cannons aren't in place yet..."

"The church indeed reacted faster than we've expected, but whether His Majesty is here or not, we need to stick to our posts and never step back," Iron Axe calmly said, "and no matter what, the enemy mustn't cross our defensive line at the foot of the mountain."

"Yes!" Brain and Van'er said in unison.

"Good. Here is my battle arrangement." Iron Axe licked his lips. "It'll take the enemy at least one day to arrive at the foot of the mountain, which gives us enough time to prepare. We have over 2,000 pieces of God's Stones of Retaliation. Assign them to as many soldiers as possible at the front rows. The machine gunners need more protection than anyone else, so they must wear God's Stones too." He roughly explained the plan he'd been conceiving. "In addition, I'll arrange 10 good gunners and a machine gun team to protect Miss Sylvie. They'll follow Miss Silvie's instructions based on her investigation of the scene to take care of the enemies who pose greater threats. Other soldiers will act in accordance with the instructions set out during the maneuver.

"I have a question," Van'er said in hesitation. "In the enemy's team, can the soldiers carrying big shields be..."

"They're most likely God's Punishment Army." Iron Axe nodded. "Judging from Miss Maggie's description, commoners won't be able to march carrying shields of such a size."

"Can a bullet penetrate it?" asked Brian.

"We won't know it unless we try," Iron Axe answered without hesitation. "If a flintlock can't harm the enemy effectively, your people just try to stop the God's Punishment Army marching forward and leave them to the artillery to take care of."

"Yes!"

"Eventually you have to rely on the artillery to solve the

problem," Van'er said smilingly. "Leave it to me, Your Excellency."

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Two days later, Danny jumped into a trench in the early morning, holding his beloved rifle.

According to the instructions yesterday, he quickly came to his spot—the right wing of a trench in the center of the battlefield. The shrubs and bushes in the surrounding areas had all been cut, leaving an open space for him to overview the entire battlefield and aim precisely.

Danny picked up a few stones from the ground, created a small rack on the side of the trench, put his rifle on the rack, and aimed at the front.

Through the sights, Danny saw dewdrops suspending on leaves above the ground, a spider clinging to a wire fence, a red clay road full of horseshoe prints, and the Impassable Mountain Range at a distance.

An excellent sniping position.

He opened the bolt, pushed the first bullet into the chamber, and waited for enemies to appear.

As a hunter, Danny had always been patient.

Since he joined the Militia in response to His Majesty's conscription, he had participated in a series of battles, such as the defense battle in the Months of Demons, the operation` against the Duke of Longsong Stronghold, the attack of King's City, etc. The weapon he used had updated from flintlock to the newest bolt rifle. In terms of combat experience, he must be one of the most experienced soldiers in the First Army. If he had not insisted on staying at the front, he would have been most likely an officer of the Gun Battalion only second to Sir Brian.

Compared with commanding others, he preferred the feeling of hunting a prey.

Ever since the day he laid hands on a flintlock, he had deeply been in love with such a weapon.

It was handy and powerful. One only needed to have a good eyesight and a little bit of gift to master it.

Holding a gun in hands, Danny could feel the power surging from the bottom of his heart.

# Chapter 610: The Hunter

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While Danny was waiting, a short guy ran toward him along the trench.

"Captain, you're early." He panted, took the sack off his shoulder, and put it at Danny's feet. "Here's your ammunition."

"If I was hunting in the mountains, I'd have come back by this time already," Danny said carelessly. "How much ammunition for me?"

"30 bullets."

"So few..." Danny murmured. "Bloody machine gunner."

The short guy was the youngest soldier in the army, only 16 years old. His name was Malt. He came to "protect" Danny.

Every sharpshooter was paired with a protector so that when enemies drew close, they could quickly suppress the enemies and won themselves time to run away or switch to bayonets.

Danny did not think that he needed a protector, especially not an underaged one. The reason he accepted Malt was that he could not turn down Karl Van Bate's implore. He had been neighbors with this Minister of Construction for years, and they had lived in the same street of the New District. Naturally, he understood that Karl viewed all the kids graduated from Karl College as his own

children.

Since the sharpshooter's position was usually at the back, the protector was actually at a safer place compared with the soldiers at the front line. Danny knew that His Majesty hated his employees covering up or colluding with each other, so taking Malt as his protector was one of the few things that he could do without offending His Majesty.

Looking at Malt who was squatting there picking bullets, Danny could not help asking, "Have you thought of changing for another job?"

"Leaving the First Army?" Malt answered without raising his head, "No, I like it here very much."

"But this isn't a game," Danny said, raising his eyebrows. "We could be killed at the battlefield anytime. You don't have to take this risk. As a Karl College graduate, you're totally qualified for a job in City Hall. There you can work quite decently and earn more than here in the army."

"But I don't like running errands for the officials every day. I just want to hold a gun to protect His Majesty." Malt put the 8 mm bullets he picked before the trench. "Besides..." He suddenly paused and seemed to be blushing.

"Because of Miss Nana?"

Malt did not reply, yet his cheeks reddened.

Danny could not help bursting into laughter. "At least half of the soldiers in the First Army admire Miss Angel. I don't think you even have a chance. Besides, her father is a baron. Even he currently doesn't have lands, his daughter isn't someone you can dream of."

"I, I'm not thinking like that," Malt said, craning his neck. "I'm satisfied as long as I can see her every day."

Danny shook his head and stopped persuading Malt. He knew how strong or stubborn one could be once he was in love. He himself was no exception.

Whenever he had time, the image of a green-haired woman would appear in his mind as soon as he closed eyes.

If she had not reached out to save him, he might have lost his life in the forest.

But at that time, she was still a minion of the demons', the embodiment of evil. Danny buried his affection deep in his heart and dared not to tell anyone. Unexpectedly, the second time they met, witches had been proved to be innocent. Consequently, she had moved into the Witch Building in the castle area and opened up various experimental fields in Misty Forest.

He could not enter the castle area as he wished, so whenever he

was on a vacation, he would always pick up his bow to hunt in Misty Forest. He even decided that when he no longer served as a soldier, he would apply to the City Hall for the forest ranger job and take Misty Forest as his new home.

"Woo... Woo...!"

At that moment, he heard the blare of the horns.

It signaled the arrival of enemies.

Danny stopped his wandering thoughts and fixed his gun holder.

No matter what, he was still a warrior at the moment. He should fight to protect His Majesty and overthrow the church who was hunting witches.

...

As the sun rose above his head, a troop with shimmering armors appeared at the foot the mountain.

In order to siege the only road leading to the mountain, their defensive line was less than one kilometer away from Hermes. The moment the enemies went off the mountain, they had stepped into the First Army's cannons' shooting range.

Danny knew full well that Iron Axe would not miss any chance to



strike the enemies.

As if to prove his thoughts were right, a series of dull roars burst behind him, which sounded like thunders coming from far away. Danny vaguely saw lines of shadows flying over his head towards the enemies.

The battle started without a sign.

From a distance, Danny could clearly see the landing points of shells, where dust was sprung up like bunches of wildflowers. The enemies which were marching like a line of ants instantly went into a panic. That was a normal reaction, considering it was the first time they were stricken by opponents whom they could not even see. If it were for the mercenaries or militia, their morale could probably totally collapse after a few rounds of shooting.

But the troop of the church did not retreat. It began to accelerate. The soldiers seemed to be not as neatly lined as before.

By the time they got closer to Danny, they had suffered three rounds of cannon attacks. The combination of 50 field artilleries was enough to bombard continuously, which was a torturous experience to the enemies. Without war horses, they had to trod on this hellish road on foot.

The God's Punishment Army, which was said to have prodigious strength, held big shields upright and advanced in the front row. They formed a gray iron wall 500 to 600 meters away from the First Army's first trench.

But it did not mean much in front of bullets. As soon as a bullet hit a big shield, it would break the shield into pieces and threw the shield holder on the ground.

"This isn't good," Danny said while shaking head. "I'm afraid they would be destructed before they even reach the first trench." He understood the First Army's fire arrangement: first, they took care of the enemies from 1,000-1,500 meters away with cannons; then when the enemies gathered before the wire fence, they swept the battlefield with machine guns; if the enemies got within 200 meters and began to rush forward, they used revolving rifles in close range combat.

"Why is it not good to destroy them?" Malt peered over the trench, standing on his tiptoe.

"Well, because then there'll be nothing for me to do." Danny collected the bullets he laid out into the waist pocket, lifted his gun, and prepared to leave.

"Where are you going?" Malt hurriedly pulled him.

"I'm going to the trench in the front row." Danny got rid of Malt's hand. "You stay here."

"I'll go with you."

"Don't follow. This is captain's order"

With these words, Danny bent over to walk along the communicating trench.

The sounds of landing shells got louder and louder. At every dull crashing sound, crumbs came off the trench walls and fell into his collar.

He then knew that he was approaching the forefront bit by bit.

After crossing three rows of trenches, before a new round of shells landed, Danny stuck out his head to watch over the trench, regardless of the fact that other team members were looking at him confusedly. He could clearly see the big shields of the God's Punishment Army, and even hear the enemies' desperate shouting and yelling.

He was about 300 meters away from the enemies.

This is close enough.

Taking a deep breath, Danny set up his rifle, aimed the sights at somewhere a little over a shield, and pulled the trigger.

Accompanied by a crisp sound, some blue blood spilled behind the shield, which, together with the shield holder, fell to the ground, revealing the bewildered Judgement Warriors hiding behind.

Danny pulled open the bolt, took off the steaming bullet shell, and pushed the bolt back again.

The loading sound thrilled and exhilarated him.

"The first one," Danny thought.

# Chapter 611: Protected

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Danny was constantly aiming, shooting, until the clip emptied. Another two big shields fell down. Danny would not waste his bullets on the Judgement Warriors. With the thin armor, the Judgement Warriors looked martial, but yet they could not even withstand the flintlock. Lord Iron Axe once said that the God's Punishment Army was a dreadful opponent because one of its soldiers could fight against 10, but at the same time, they were scarce and troublesome to train, so they were the targets worth hunting.

The reason he disliked the machine gunners was that he felt those arrogant fellows, although they used exactly the same bullets as he did, shot with an astonishingly low efficiency.

During the only two times of live practice, a machine gun squad fired several chests of bullets within one hour, which even made Lord Iron Axe's heart ache. But while checking the bullet holes, only around 100 bullets actually hit the targets. Danny felt it was totally a waste of resources.

Of course, he also understood the significance of the Mark I machine gun. At least while faced with swarming enemies, it could stop their attacking momentum. But in terms of hunting results, sharpshooters were more reliable.

One bullet for one enemy.

This was his aim for strict training.

Danny pulled out the clip, and skillfully reloaded it. When he was about to stand up and start shooting, he heard someone gasping. Looking over his shoulder, he saw Malt.

"Damn it! Didn't I tell you to stay where you were?" He shouted at Malt, "You violated a military order!"

"Lord Brian said that a soldier can never leave his position lest for exceptional cases, so you've violated a military order," saying this, Malt wiped the sweat on his forehead. "As your protector, I must stay by your side!"

"..." Holding back the impulse to beat Malt, Danny grabbed a handful of bullets from his pocket and threw them in front of Malt. "Fill the clip. Stay down unless there's an emergency!"

"Yes, Captain!" the short guy saluted and said smilingly.

After Danny killed five enemies, there appeared to be some changes in the enemy's troop.

The church commander probably believed that they would not make it to the trench if they kept on charging that way and so they made a change. The God's Punishment Army abandoned their big shields and charged toward the trenches. They moved at such a fast speed that even horses would not outrun them. They were getting closer and closer!

The sound of revolving rifles and machine guns rang out at the same time.

Suddenly, some blood fog appeared in front of Danny. The dust rising from the ground was denser than the time when the cannons bombarded. It looked as if there was an invisible giant hand severely beat the group of charging warriors. Facing this unstoppable force, the enemy's charging speed was greatly slowed down. Anyone touched by this invisible force was torn into pieces with blood splashing everywhere.

A soldier of the God's Punishment Army kept running forward even after one of his arms was shot by a bullet. When Danny aimed his gun at him, a 'sand snake' composed of dozens of lines of dust sloppily passed through the soldier's body, which was the unique trajectory of a machine gun. The soldier's chest suddenly waved like a pool of water, blue blood splashed out of his back, and his ribs were even broken by the scorching airflow of the passing bullets.

The soldier, though he lost his balance and was wrinkled up like a piece of rag, still managed to run for another three to four steps before falling to the ground due to the inertia. Danny noticed that his back had gone rotten.

"Watch out, Captain!" Malt shouted suddenly.

Danny was shocked. When he turned his head, he saw another soldier from the God's Punishment Army, appearing from the boundless dust and holding a spear upright.

Then the soldier bent over and threw the spear at Danny.

He barely saw how the soldier threw the spear.

"Too careless. I've been so focused on observing the enemies that I attracted their attention. A hunter shouldn't expose himself under the prey's eyesight for too long," Danny thought.

Before he could react, Malt heavily hit him on the body. Both of them fell on the trench ground. At the same time, a loud sound came above their heads.

Danny felt a pain came from the back of his head, and his body was completely covered by dirt.

Danny felt the sound of gunfires suddenly faded away, and an unbearable buzzing kept echoing in his ears.

After a long time, Danny recovered his senses. Touching the back of his head, he felt something sticky. "I must have hit on something hard when I fell on the ground. Since I could remain sober, it must be nothing serious."

With his blurry eyesight, he saw a teammate coming to him.

"Are you alright?"



Danny could only vaguely hear it. He managed to wave his hand, indicating he was fine.

"Give me a hand. Two people are wounded," the teammate shouted.

Soon, Danny and Malt were surrounded by more teammates and were dragged out of the collapsed pile of dirt.

At that moment, Danny noticed that the short spear had torn apart the edge of the trench, creating a crescent-shaped gap. It did not fly away over his head but instead it hit the trench edge, penetrated the thin soil, and struck into the trench wall. The dirt that fell on their bodies was from the spot where the spear's hit.

When he looked at Malt, his heart suddenly clenched.

He saw there was a bleeding wound as big as a bowl on Malt's shoulder, and his arm almost fell off, only a few strands of skin connected the shoulder, his white bones exposed.

"The spear wasn't thrown in vain. It hit Malt."

The teammates went back to the battle, leaving one soldier to take care of Malt. All the soldiers in the First Army understood that as long as a wounded soldier could survive till the end of the battle, Miss Nana would make him fully recover. So hemostasis and dressing was a compulsory course in the First Army. The soldier left pulled out a dagger, decisively cut Malt's arm off and

then sprinkled the herbs in his pocket on Malt's wound before he wrapped the wound with gauze.

After suffering this treatment, Malt awoke from his coma, murmuring a faint groan.

"Lie still. You're not going to die." The soldier consoled him.

"Where is Cap-Captain Danny?"

"I'm here." Danny clenched his teeth, upheld his weak limbs, and climbed to Malt's side. "Why would you do that for me..."

"Because I'm your protector. Of, of course, I won't leave you behind." Malt's mouth slowly opened and shut. "How did I do? I fulfilled my duty, didn't I?"

Danny suddenly felt an unspeakable guilt surging from the bottom of his heart. "Sure... you did very well."

"Really?" Malt smiled with a difficulty. "This will pave my way to meet Miss Nana."

"That's right. Both of you can meet her." The soldier looked at Danny. "You can take care of him, right? I need to go back to my position."

"Yes, I can... Thank you," Danny said, nodding.

After the soldier left, Danny slowly picked up his gun from the ground, dusted off the dirt, and managed to stand up.

"I can still fight!"

"The enemy must pay for this wound with blood!" Danny thought.

However, the approaching army of the church was no more. In the pervading dust, the enemies were retreating in panic, and only their backs could be vaguely seen.

Cheers burst out from the trenches.

They had won!

# Chapter 612: Battle's End

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Roland walked out of the cabinet as the gunboat staggered to a stop. He was fascinated by what he saw.

The arch-typed mountain rocks, which extended out from both sides, wrapped around the entire town like two huge arms. The rays of sunlight slanted along the finger-wide crevice, forming a wall of golden shimmers.

Numberless vines, which looked like green hair, grew out of the bottom of the rocks. Some bulky ones even reached the ground, tempting people to climb up.

When the sun rays sifted through dense twigs and branches and splintered up into glints of the muttering brook, Roland felt like he was in a untraversed forest. However, the area was not completely uncultivated. Along Soundless River stood different types of buildings constructed by men. Townsmen passed through waist-high bushes back and forth. Streaks of smokes could be detected from the distance. Everything around this area was in perfect harmony with nature.

Due to a lack of sunshine, the temperature in this town was slightly lower than that in other places. The colors of plants, naturally, were in much deeper shades. No wonder the town was called Deepvalley Town.

Roland and the witches stepped on the dock covered with mosses and met the people who had been waiting there for a long time. The three at the front were obviously the general commander of the First Army, Iron Axes, the Duke of the Northern Region, Calvin, and his daughter, Edith.

"We've met again, Your Majesty." Edith performed a curtsy. "Congratulations on the victory of your first battle."

"I've heard the news on my way here. You did a good job." Roland gave an approving nod. "Iron Axes told me you not only smoothed out the transportation of food and ammunition, but also successfully lured the enemies."

"These are the obligations of Kant Family," she replied with a faint smile. "The tradesmen in the Northern Region are happy to be at your service."

"But the owner of this town was still Timothy Wimbledon half a year ago," Roland said within himself. The tradesmen in the three cities probably had never heard of the new king. They were willing to offer their services and carry out his plan was simply because of Edith's advertisement and her tremendous personal influence over the Northern Region.

After giving a few words of encouragement, Roland turned to Iron Axes and asked, "Have you obtained the casualties?"

"Yes, Your Majesty." Iron Axe administered a military salute and continued, "The detailed report has been sent to your office."

"O-office?"

"I've discussed this matter with Earl Haier. We've decided that you should use his castle as your palace during your stay at Deepvalley Town." Edith further explained. "Also, I've had the study refurbished, making it look like the one in the Border Area. Miss Maggie told me that you like a bright room. So, I knocked down a wall with a sunny exposure and replaced it with a French window.

"Really?" Roland asked with interest. "Then where will the earl stay?"

"In order not to disturb your work, he'll live in his mansion in the suburb." The Pearl of the Northern Region paused for a moment and then asked, "You want me to summon him?"

"No, that's fine. I bet he doesn't like partake in politics." Roland waved his hand. "Let's get into the castle first."

"Alright. Please follow me."

"Is this the wonder of power?" Roland thought while smacking his lips. "It isn't bad to have a taste of it from time to time."

...

Roland thought he was back to City of Neverwinter upon his entry to the study. The large mahogany desk, along with the coffee table and the recliner at the corner was exactly the same as those in the Border Area. The only big difference was the sceneries outside the French window. Here, he could see the green dale through the window instead of the somber Impassable Mountain Range.

He wondered what the previous owner, Earl Haier, would think about the renovation after he left.

Roland sat back to the desk and started to read the report.

Although he had learned how the battle had progressed, he felt exhilarated when he caught sight of the church's casualties.

This was definitely a victory worthy to be remembered.

His concern about God's Punishment Army dissipated when he saw 156 deaths among the God's Punishment Warriors. It appeared that these powerful, fearless killing machines were not at all unconquerable. After all, flesh and blood could not compete against bullets and fire. Roland believed there should not be many God's Punishment Warriors left, as every conversion required a witch's blood. Agatha estimated the army should consist of no more than 1,500 warriors, provided that the Bloody Moon did not arrive.

A casualty ratio of one to ten was already high enough for the church to lament their loss.

In addition to the God's Punishment Warriors, there were over 300 members of the Judgement Army killed in action, more than 20 of them severely injured and four commanders captured. These numbers were trivial. Despite the fact that Judgement Warriors were mostly strong-willed and skillful combaters, Roland did not take them seriously, as they were essentially the same as knights.

What was really lucky was that they had not encountered any pure witches who were extremely difficult to deal with. If they unfortunately had, they probably would not have won that easily just with Sylvie and Iffy taking charge. In fact, Sylvie had instructed the machine gun team to specifically tackle permeating pure witches.

"What about the casualties in the First Army?" Roland folded the report.

"Two killed and 21 severely injured," Iron Axe answered in a low tone. "All resulted from a close-range spearing from the God's Punishment Army. The wounded has now recovered and returned to service."

After learning that the church had launched the attack, Lightning brought Nana to Deepvalley Town in no time. Nobody could provide a better treatment than Miss Angel.

Roland knocked on the desk and ordered. "Arrange a boat to send the bodies of the killed soldiers to City of Neverwinter for a burial."

"Yes, Your Majesty." After a short pause, Iron Axe asked, "What



will you do with the unit leader of the fourth premium shooting unit, Danny, Your Majesty?"

"That old hunter who shot five members of the God's Punishment Army?" Roland took up the teacup and sipped the tea that tasted exactly the same as the premium tea in the palace. "What's your opinion?"

During the rescue, Brian noticed that the injuries Danny and his protector sustained appeared to be inconsistent with their positions. The news soon reached Roland that very night via the Sigil of Listening. At that time, the war had just ended. Considering that the First Army was still absorbed in their celebration and that the protector was in a critical condition, Roland simply asked Iron Axe to first treat the wounded. Now, since they had arrived at Deepvalley Town, it was time to bring up this matter.

"I think although Danny disregarded the instruction and left his post without permission, he did make a big contribution to the victory. He shot five God's Punishment Warriors down by himself. Such a remarkable performance would be more than enough to make him a celebrity in the Army. Therefore, I reckon his merits offset his demerits." Iron Axes said slowly, "In the Iron Sand City, a fighter like him will even be rewarded by his master, so..."

"But the First Army was not any old-school army that rewards their soldiers based on how many they've killed." Roland interrupted. "Do you remember what I taught you during the first training session?"

Iron Axe swallowed hard. "You taught us disciplines, Your Majesty."

"Only a well-disciplined army can become invincible." Roland rose to his feet and paced to the French window. "I hope you bear this in mind all the time. Now, tell me, how are you supposed to deal with him?"

# Chapter 613: Interrogation

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"Suspension without pay and a detention of 15 days if no further harms are caused; dismissal and bring him to your trial, if further harms are caused, Your Majesty," Iron Axes replied immediately.

"Correct. You memorize it well. Do what you just said." As there was no military tribunal at this point, Roland had to try cases of serious misconduct in the army by himself. In this case, Danny's behavior was apparently not so serious as to put him on a trial. "In view of the upcoming great war, we'll first detain him for five days and have him serve the rest in City of Neverwinter."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"You don't need to worry about the reactions among other soldiers. This sets a good example and tells them that everybody will be subject to punishment if he breaks the rules, regardless of how great his contribution to the army is." Roland paused for a moment and then continued, "Of course, we won't forget what he's done for the army either. If somebody ever asks, just tell him that I have my own arrangement."

In fact, Roland knew that he was also partially responsible for such a wrong conductive behavior. Although he had created a premium shooting unit of 50 people, he did not separate those talented, experienced snipers from the soldiers of the ordinary gun battalion. He simply instructed all of them to serve as flanks and shoot with revolving rifles from a farther distance, for the purpose of stopping enemies who tried to sneakily enter the machine gun bunker from the marginal area.

Danny, however, actually acted more like a professional sniper. He chose his position and fired based on his own judgement to eliminate the enemies who posed the greatest threats. Roland had thought about specifically forming a sniper team, and yet such a team had higher requirements for guns, ammunition and especially its team members. He had to, at the same time, keep an eye on the snipers to make sure that every one of them was proactive and productive.

Perhaps, he would make some improvements in the current premium shooting unit after this war concluded.

"By the way, Your Majesty, the captured church's commanders have disclosed some... particular information." Iron Axes was carefully choosing his words. "It's about the God's Punishment Army."

"What's it?"

"They said the members of God's Punishment Army can't fight on their own. They can only complete the most basic mission after a commander orders them to do so."

Roland turned around. "Really? Anything else?" Ashes had already told him about it, which was the reason he dared to take his armies to the north and provoke the church. If God's Punishment Warriors could fight independently, only a very few of them would be enough to cause riots across the kingdom and bring him trouble.

"A commander can be an ordinary person or a pure witch, and can't be changed once appointed." Iron Axes recollected. "Any new members of God's Punishment Army will attend a ceremony to pledge allegiance. One captive admitted that he attended such a ceremony once."

Roland instructed immediately. "Take me to them. Also, bring Agatha."

...

Roland met the four separately-confined captives down in the dungeon.

Deepvalley Town was overall pleasantly cool and refreshing above the ground. Its underground surroundings, however, was freezing and damp. All four was blindfolded, drenched, with their hands tied behind their back. Although no visible wounds could be detected, they were all shivering. Apparently, Iron Axes had applied some unique interrogation techniques, which, as he suggested, few people could endure for one day.

Yet the church's believers were not ordinary prisoners. Their ardent piety made them extremely strong.

"Only the two on the right are willing to speak up." The man from the Sand Nation said in a low voice. "One of them is the chief justice of the church, while the other is the priest in Holy City. The other two refuse to tell us anything. Of course, they don't know

their friends have already confessed."

Not really familiar with the institution and hierarchy of the church, Roland asked directly, "Who attended the ceremony where the God's Punishment Army pledges allegiance? Take him to the interrogation room."

The jailor soon dragged the priest to a small chamber next door. Iron Axes poured some cold water on his head to awaken him. "Farat, I. have a few questions to ask you."

He quivered violently and started to speak feebly, "I've told you... everything I know. Please kill me now." The priest's voice was weak and faint as if he were in great agony.

"Tell me about the ceremony for the God's Punishment Army."

Farat did not respond but simply shook his head.

"Listen. This is the last round of the interrogation." Iron Axe bent over and whispered in his ear, "I'll let you go once you've answered all the questions."

It took him quite a while to speak again. "The ceremony... is usually held in the Tower of Babel, which is only accessible to God's Punishment Warriors, the pope and commanders. Everybody... must be completely silent during the process. Even the slightest sound will ruin the whole ceremony."

"Why's that?" Roland questioned.

"Because new warriors recognize their commanders by sounds."

"The first sound they hear?"

"It can be more than one." Farat gasped. "The chosen commanders will read hymns together. God's Punishment Warriors will accept everyone during that time period."

"What about you? Are you also a commander?"

"I'm responsible... for a group, a group of ten God's Punishment Warriors."

"But that ten people also need to follow the orders issued by your superior, correct?"

The priest nodded. "All the God's Punishment Armies should obey the supreme pontiff's orders."

"That's how it works," Roland thought. He had thought they commanded this unconscious army telepathically or via brainwaves, but they actually controlled them through sounds. To him, it appeared to be a very unnecessarily complex and less efficient method. Not only did soundwaves easily diminish, but there was a big chance of issuing contradictory orders as well. Either of the problems would cause confusion to the God's Punishment Army.

"You said once a commander is appointed, he can't be changed. What if God's Punishment Warriors lose all their commanders?" Agatha ventured suddenly.

Hearing it was a lady, Farat was stunned.

"Answer!" Iron Axe got some more water.

"I... don't know."

"You're lying." Roland immediately received Nightingale's hint. "You'd better not play any tricks on us if you don't want to stay here for another half a month."

The priest clenched his teeth and finally said, "They, they'll go to Barbarian Land themselves. That's all I know."

"Barbarian Land?" Agatha echoed in surprise.

"It's just a hearsay... Usually, when this happens, some other warriors will stop him. But..." He hesitated for a moment. "It's rumored some God's Punishment Warriors, who weren't properly managed, fled to Barbarian Land many years ago, and have stayed there ever since."

"Do you know how the God's Punishment Army is converted?"



"Well... Only the supreme pontiff can host the ceremony..."

"When the pope retires, how does he assign his authority to control the God's Punishment Army?"

"I, I don't know..." Beads of perspiration started to appear on his forehead.

"Four hundred years ago, how was the church founded?"

"Have you heard of the name 'Alice'? How about the Union and Taquila?"

The priest was just irresponsible to any questions Agatha put forward afterwards.

"He truly doesn't know. Let's go. There's no need to continue with this interrogation anymore." After receiving the confirmation from Nightingale, Roland said.

When the three of them was about to leave the dungeon, Iron Axes trotted to them and asked, "Your Majesty, what about these captives from the church..."

"Do what you've promised earlier."

# Chapter 614: Agatha's Prediction

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When they returned to the castle, Roland turned towards Agatha and asked, "Have you recalled anything?"

"Most likely, the God's Punishment Army was only successfully researched after Taquila fell completely. I don't understand it much," she replied, shaking her head. "But... it's definitely not as simple as what the church priest said. At least, it doesn't explain how a newly-crowned pope is able to take over control of the God's Punishment Army from the previous pope."

"Also, it's very odd that a runaway God's Punishment Army would actively advance towards the Barbarian Land." Agatha continued after a brief pause, "The Barbarian Land that you people speak of should be the Fertile Plains of 400 years ago. There's nothing there apart from the ruins of the holy city. And it's too far-fetched to say that they were enticed by the demons."

"Who knows." Roland casually commented. "You've also seen that their blood is blue in color. They can't be considered the same species as us." He was not highly interested in what exactly attracted the God's Punishment Army. What he most wanted to know at present was their Achilles' heel, and how to effectively guard against an assault on his lines. As could be seen from the previous wave of spear throwing, the lack of fortifications made the God's Punishment Army quite threatening. "If they're truly vulnerable to noise, maybe Echo's ability can..."

"I don't approve of doing this." The ancient witch rejected his idea. "There are a lot of risks that way."

"Indeed, it's quite risky to sneak close to their commander, but we can..."

"No, I'm not talking about Echo." Agatha interrupted his words. "I'm talking about you."

"Me?" Roland was surprised.

"If Echo is to sneak up to the commander, she would need Nightingale's Mist. When so, you would be left without protection. The church would only need to send forth a pure witch with special abilities to claim your life easily," she replied unhesitatingly. "Although you're a normal person who's weak and powerless, we can't do without you at present if we're to defeat the demons. So, protecting you is still the most important thing to do. We can't take any kind of risk with that."

"I really can't tell if you're praising or insulting me." Roland laughed bitterly. "When that time comes, I'll put on the God's Stone of Retaliation."

"The God's Stone of Retaliation is only a means of insurance. It's not a completely secure barrier." Agatha stated bluntly. "Even Nightingale isn't completely failsafe, but we don't have a better way."

"As long as I'm still alive, His Majesty won't come under any harm." Nightingale could not restrain herself from revealing her figure. It was apparent that she did not take kindly to Agatha's

words.

"I hope so." The ancient witch did not dispute this point further. She turned to leave the study but stopped when she reached the door.

"What's the matter?" Roland asked.

Agatha remained silent for a while before she replied, "I don't know whether to talk about these things... Her immense power aside, the reason why Lady Alice was able to become Queen of Starfall City and also the Head of the Three Chairs was that her intelligence and methods were superior to most witches. On a few occasions, her decisions saved the Union from the verge of collapse. Without her, Taquila wouldn't have survived until then. Many people believed that if she was born before the first Battle of Divine Will, she would have ended this hopeless war early on."

"What're you trying to say?"

She turned her head back and frowned slightly. "What I mean is, the powerful warriors in whom she placed her hopes of saving the witches shouldn't have turned out this way."

"You feel that the present God's Punishment Army may not have been the same as the one 400 years ago?" Roland asked in surprise.

"The God's Punishment Warriors aren't afraid of magic power, never panic, and are extremely powerful. They indeed seem to

possess a great advantage over the demons. But... they won't be able to make the decisive difference. Furthermore, they need a commander wherever they go, and don't have the ability to perform long-distance attacks. I feel that Lady Alice shouldn't place high hopes on this kind of warriors." Agatha sighed. "Of course, these are just my predictions. Only the church knows what exactly happened to the Union after Taquila fell."

A long time after she left the room, Roland was still stuck in his thoughts.

Agatha's words were indeed reasonable. Was it really possible that the God's Punishment Army project, which required the Queen of Starfall City to pay such a huge price to carry out, was only intended to produce an expensive yet cumbersome killing machine?

Just as he was about to head out of the castle to get some fresh air, the Sigil of Listening that Nightingale was wearing suddenly rang.

"This is Lightning here. My position is in the northwest, in the sky above Coldwind Ridge! I've just observed that the enemy is now retreating. I repeat, the enemy is retreating!"

"Retreating?"

"They're all running towards the holy city, coo!" Maggie added.

"I see." Roland immediately summoned a guard from outside. "Inform Iron Axe, Edith, Duke Calvin and all members of the Adviser Department to report here for a meeting."

"This is undoubtedly good news," Roland thought excitedly. He had not thought that the church's army would abandon Coldwind Ridge and retreat directly to the highland of Hermes. In this way, he would have a chance to evacuate all of the townspeople before the holy city recaptured Coldwind Ridge.

"They're afraid." Nightingale laughed.

"Perhaps so. But their retreat suggests that the church is unable to send out reinforcements on short notice." Roland surmised while stroking his chin. "Our earlier predictions weren't wrong. This contingent of more than 1,000 people was probably an advance force which the church came up with last-minute. If they don't take the initiative to attack our lines, I really don't know what to do with the church."

When he decided to use this tactic, he had already in a sense decided to give up Coldwind Ridge. After all, it was much closer to Hermes. Now that he had the chance to prevent the townspeople from becoming victims of the Pill of Madness, he felt considerably relieved.

The relevant members quickly gathered in the reception room. Roland retold Lightning's intelligence report to them and looked around at everyone present. "Are there any questions?"

"Your Majesty, why don't you guard Coldwind Ridge directly?" Duke Calvin asked in puzzlement. "It's strategically located, and there's only one route that leads to the holy city. Isn't it more advantageous than guarding the foot of the mountain?"

"It only appears so. In reality, it's surrounded by mountains on three sides, and the slopes pass directly over its top. The enemy only needs to use a rope to infiltrate our line of defense." Roland shrugged his shoulders. "We've discussed this in detail in City of Neverwinter. You can ask Edith for more specifics. Anyone else?"

Seeing that no one responded, he issued his order. "If so, the evacuation campaign will be carried out by the First Army. The grain reserves and gold royals can be left behind. Our concern is regarding the residents—whether by coercion or force, I don't want a single person to be left behind in Coldwind Ridge. In addition, the local nobles may have a better persuasive effect. I'm referring particularly to the famous Pearl of the Northern Region." He paused at this. "Iron Axe and Edith, you two will be in charge of this matter."

"Yes!"

"As you wish, Your Majesty."

"As for the Adviser Department." He glanced towards Earl Eltek and the others. "Your task is to assist the Duke of the Northern Region to make arrangements for the evacuated people. This will include computing the number of people, registering their identities, and finding food and lodging for them. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," the crowd replied in unison.

"Excellent, let's begin immediately!" Roland thumped the table and exclaimed.



# Chapter 615: Wavering Faith

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In the Tower of Babel of Hermes Cathedral.

The hurried footsteps of a guard spoiled the peace and quiet in the ring hall. Somewhat unhappy with this, Tayfun placed his breakfast down and glanced at the frantic comer. "Is there a problem?"

"Your Eminence, something's up in Coldwind Ridge." The guard moved close and whispered in Tayfun's ears. "It seems that Lord Soli Daal has been badly injured over there." He proceeded to explain everything that he had heard about the incident quickly.

"What!" Tayfun could not believe his own ears. "Our advance force has lost more than half of its men, while Soli was seriously bloodied?" The old bishop grabbed the guard by the neck and asked, "Where's he now?"

"Sent to the hospital."

"How about the God's Punishment Army?"

"They were ordered to hold their positions and await further instructions. Right now, they're gathered in the cathedral."

"Inform His Holiness and Lady El immediately about this matter. Also, gather and look after all those who took part in this expedition. Close the doors of the cathedral and prevent other

believers from entering or leaving for now!" Tayfun seemed to forget about his breakfast. "I'll head to the hospital straight away."

"Yes, Your Excellency!"

How could this happen?

He could feel his heart palpitating non-stop. In principle, a 1,300-strong platoon, of which 300 were God's Punishment Warriors, should not have had problems dealing with Coldwind Ridge. Before Soli was promoted to bishop, he was a veteran chief justice, and one of His Holiness Mayne's most able subordinates. Even if they encountered demons or beasts, there should not have been so many victims!

Although fear clouded his heart, the old bishop remained very clear that the most important thing to do at the moment was to block the news from leaking out, so as to prevent the believers' faith from being shaken. The next most important thing was to find out exactly what happened to Soli Daal in Coldwind Ridge.

When he reached the hospital, El was already there—it was evident that the latter had an alternative source of information. The two of them exchanged looks and walked together solemnly into Soli's medical room.

A pure witch was tending to the archbishop's wounds. Soli was missing an arm, and the wound around the remaining flesh had been tightly dressed with cotton. When he saw the other two archbishops, his dazed eyes seemed to focus again, and he

struggled to sit up.

"You may leave first." Tayfun urged the pure witch to depart and then assisted Soli to sit up. "How's your injury?"

"I want to see His Holiness!" Soli growled. "Bring me to the Pivotal Secret Area at once!"

"Tell us what happened first," El replied coldly. "Only then we'll consider whether to bring you to see the pope or to throw you in jail and await trial."

"Scoundrel, now it's not the time to quarrel." Soli gnashed his teeth. "Coldwind Ridge was a trap. Roland Wimbledon's firearms are much scarier than Timothy's. I have to let His Holiness know..."

"I don't want to be kept in the dark while covering your ass, Mister Soli Daal!" El raised her voice several notches. "Do you know how embarrassing your return was? When passing through the city gate, anyone could see how incomplete and defeated our advance force was. People in the holy city have already begun asking questions. If I didn't get the tribunal to detain a few busybodies, the whole city will be talking about these rumors tomorrow!" She grabbed him by the collar. "You should know how serious this will be!"

Tayfun knew that El was perfectly right. The loss of over 100 God's Punishment Warriors was equivalent to the loss over the past two years. And the enemy this time was only a small town in

the mountains. This was an absolute disgrace to the church.

More critically, if the news spread, the faith of the believers would be immensely affected.

Ever since the God's Punishment Army started being sent to fight demonic beasts, there had been hearsay that it was all-conquering and invincible. It even appeared so. If even the enormous and savage demonic beasts were no matches for the God's Punishment Army, what kind of enemy could defeat it?

Just as Tayfun was about to give a few lines of advice, the room door was suddenly pushed open.

"Hope I'm not late." The white-haired witch, Zero, walked into the room. "The pope wants to see you, and requests that you don't divulge the specific circumstances of the battle. Are you able to walk on your own?"

"Lady Zero, we can't..." El protested.

Zero cut her off quickly. "Don't worry. The pope is only worried that the secret of the God's Punishment Army may be leaked out. After he has finished his inquiry into the matter, I'll tell you everything."

"What secret?"

"Forgive me, but I can't say." Zero laughed. "Because I don't know

it myself."

"I... can walk." Soli struggled off the bed and took two steps before he fell down.

"No need to act tough." The pure witch snapped her fingers, and instantly, two Trap Area guards wearing blue cloaks walked in and lifted the archbishop up. "Once we're in the Pivotal Secret Area, you'll have a wheelchair to move freely in."

"F\*cking b\*itch." After Soli left with Zero, El spat on the ground angrily and walked straight out of the medical room.

Tayfun watched grimly as the pure witch's figure slowly disappeared into the distance, and did not say a word for a long time.

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As Soli walked down the stone steps to the deep abyss below the cathedral, there was a look of excitement on his face. This was the first time that he entered the core area of the church. Even his breath became shorter and hurried.

"How do you intend to explain the heavy losses of the God's Punishment Army to Pope Mayne?" After he sat down on a wheelchair, Zero personally pushed him toward the Trap Area.

"The defeat this time was indeed caused by my carelessness. I'm

willing to accept any punishment." The archbishop hesitated for a moment. "And, I... wish to apply to His Holiness to become a God's Punishment Warrior myself."

"Are you sure? You want to give up your archbishop position and become a minion?"

"They aren't minions!" Soli could not help arguing. "Every God's Punishment Warrior is a brave and steadfast soldier. That's why they are willing to sacrifice their lives and fight for the glory of the church! I've let them down and caused immeasurable loss to the church. The best way for me to compensate and make up for my mistakes is to throw myself into the fight!"

"Is that so?" Zero shrugged her shoulders. "I feel that the pope won't agree."

"I'll do my best to persuade him. I believe that Pope Mayne will definitely..."

"That's not the reason." She shook her head. "Converting into a God's Punishment Warrior requires witch blood, and every witch isn't easy to come by. Now that you've lost an arm, your fighting ability is much weaker than before even if the conversion is successful. Do you think the pope will waste witch blood on a handicapped person?"

"What're you saying? Wait... Stop!"

As Zero pushed the wheelchair along the long corridor, she paused at the end of the Trap Area.

"Is there a problem?"

"The incarnation ceremony of the God's Punishment Army is a secret that only the Supreme Pontiff knows. How do you know what the ceremony requires?" Soli's eyes widened. "It's impossible that Pope Mayne told you!"

"You're not wrong, he definitely wouldn't." She waited for the guards to open the cage and calmly placed the archbishop inside the cage. "But I don't need him to tell me, because... I'm the pope."

"That's... blasphemy!" Soli turned his head back in disbelief, only to see a beam of light heading in his direction.

# Chapter 616: The Violent Tide Rises

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Harsh and piercing booms were everywhere.

All that Zero could hear between these booms were faint cries of pain.

The frontline was a vanguard formed by God's Punishment Warriors, while the backline was the slowly advancing Judgement Army. This was the "Big Shield" formation that was rehearsed to deal with the swarm attacks of demonic beasts, but it was equally effective against crossbows and flintlocks. The iron shields, which were each only as thick as a finger, were able to deflect volleys of arrows, and could not be penetrated by Timothy's imitation flintlocks. Their only disadvantage was that they were excessively heavy, and thus only the God's Punishment Army could carry them into battle.

However, this time, it lost its effectiveness.

Every now and then, a God's Punishment Warrior would be split into two by iron balls that came whizzing towards him, and even the people standing behind could be struck by the same ball. Blood quickly burst out of the bodily punctures created by these balls. Those warriors who did not die on the spot would clutch on to their innards or limbs and scream in pain, unintentionally sapping the morale of their comrades who were still fighting.



"This can't continue. Get the God's Punishment Army to charge!" an assistant shouted.

"I agree, Lord Soli." Another commander seconded while clutching his fists. "These iron balls can only travel in a straight line, and can't be fired too quickly. The right thing for us to do is to spread out, and then we won't be easily targeted anymore!"

"Got it. Pass down my orders to spread out our formation and perform a full charge!"

Zero heard Soli Daal issuing an order to attack.

However, right at this moment, a new kind of weapon entered the battlefield.

It sounded like an incessant sequence of raindrops, yet also like the buzz of gold daggers striking against one another. A cloud of smoke suddenly rose up in front of the charging warriors and caused them to fall on the ground like cut wheat. It was impossible for Zero to see where the attack was coming from.

The commanders' faces turned white all at once.

Everyone knew that the outcome of this battle was decided.

Zero heard a sudden hissing sound piercing through the air. It was sharp yet cryptic, like the utterance of a viper.

Danger!

She turned her gaze towards the direction that the sound was coming from. She subconsciously wanted to hide from it, but quickly remembered that the body she was in did not belong to her.

Unfortunately, Soli Daal did not have a fraction of her alertness.

A single iron ball fell from midair and bounced on the ground directly in front of him. As it rebounded up high, it brushed across his body.

Zero could only feel her vision spinning in circles before she fell on the ground.

Fresh blood gushed out from Soli's shoulders. The place where his arm should be had become vacant. He clenched his teeth to prevent himself from crying in pain.

The people around him frantically gathered around.

"Your Eminence!"

"My goodness gracious, your hand..."

"Retreat, get all of them to retreat!"

"Bring Lord Soli away from this place, and I'll stay behind!"

Her recollection broke off at this point.

Zero opened her eyes. In front of her once again were God's stone prisms and the Pivotal Secret Temple deep underground.

"So that's what happened." She lowered her head and grinned uncontrollably.

In this case, everything makes sense now.

Why Roland Wimbledon was able to become from the low-profile lord of Border Town to the new king of Graycastle; why he was able to defeat the duke's knightage and the 2nd Prince's crazed army time and time again, and was even able to seize King's City within a day—this was the reason.

The continuous booms, the smell of gunpowder smoke in the air... these things proved the existence of a new kind of firearm that was vastly superior to Timothy's imitation snow powder pipes.

If Zero had not "personally witnessed" it, she would never have imagined that snow powder weapons could be so powerful.

Of course, she knew that it was not a secret passed down within

the Wimbledon family, or else Timothy and Garcia would not be ignorant of it.

Without a doubt, Roland had encountered something in Border Town which allowed him to have today's success.

Another possibility was that he had mastered the ancient tricks of some secluded family—ever since the Union was dissolved, a few builders and designers who had aided the local people were no longer in touch. Many of them possessed specialized skills and crafts, and therefore it was possible that one of them had devised these ingenious weapons.

Or, perhaps, the weapons were found in some ruins hidden deep in the Impassable Mountain Range. The historical records in the library had mentioned that there were a few strange ruins of unknown origin located around the border of Barbarian Land. In fact, it was the discovery of an underground labyrinth that had led to the eventual division of the Union.

But Zero was more inclined to believe that it was the ability of some witch that gave regular snow powder such deadly power.

This would also explain why Roland had changed his attitude, recruited witches in large numbers, and helped to clear the injustices they faced.

"Forget it, my speculation doesn't matter at all. No matter what the reason was, Roland Wimbledon knows best about it," thought Zero.

Zero knew that if she devoured Roland, she would get to understand everything about these weapons.

"Lady... Zero?" The guard captain standing at the cage exit asked worriedly, having not heard a sound from her for a long time.

Zero suppressed the excitement in her heart and waited until the grin on her face completely disappeared before she walked unhurriedly out of the cage. "I'm fine. Inform the intelligence agency to call back all of the pure witches that are still in Kingdom of Dawn."

"All?" The captain seemed astonished. "But the plan that you lay down before..."

"The decisive battle is about to begin," Zero explained slowly. "I want to see everyone."

There was no question that compared to Roland's knowledge, the Kingdom of Dawn's situation was insignificant.

"So powerful, such an amazing range of fire, and able to be used by anyone." Zero could understand its importance just by thinking about it.

If this weapon could be mass assembled before the Bloody Moon arrived, the Holy City's chances of defeating the demons would be significantly increased.

As for herself, she would be able to move one step closer to the divine will.

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Deepvalley Town, the Northern Region of Kingdom of Graycastle.

After dinner, Iffy returned to her bedroom in the castle and immediately let out an uncontrollable yawn. In the past fortnight, apart from executing the Tooth Extraction Campaign, there was also no time for rest after reaching the small town. She not only had to assist the First Army in guarding their camp, but also then followed Edith and her entourage to Coldwind Ridge to resettle the local residents. Although she was extremely busy, she felt that her life was rather meaningful like this.

After her mood calmed down, she realized that the non-combat witches indeed possessed their own unique strengths. She also began to feel that aside from her abilities, she was not really different from most normal people.

As observed from her daily interactions with people, she was slowly being accepted by the members of the Witch Union. While she was performing a vigilance task, Maggie even said hello to her for the first time ever—despite Lightning looking unhappy about it.

Iffy did not expect them to forgive her, and instead, she hoped to

make up for her wrongdoings through action. In fact, she did not care whether she could ultimately become a sister to them. She only focused on atonement.

Atonement for her one and only friend, Annie.

Just as she was about to go to bed, someone knocked on her door.

When she opened the door, she was surprised to see that it was the leader of Sleeping Island, Lady Tilly Wimbledon.

"I wish to talk to you about the Bloodfang Association." Tilly sighed softly. "As well as Heidi Morgan and... Annie."

# Chapter 617: The Rose of Coldwind Ridge

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Iffy silently listened as Tilly explained the whole story of the founding of the Bloodfang Association, as well as Heidi Morgan's real intention. When she heard that Annie was given to the noble by Skyflare, she felt as if something was squeezing her heart.

"Heidi... where's she now?"

"She has been served her due punishment." Ashes, who was standing behind Tilly, answered. "During the arrest, Skyflare attempted to resist and thus had gone down the same path as Heidi."

"Oh... thank you," Iffy said softly.

She unclenched her fists involuntarily and suddenly felt at a loss.

Even though those who were responsible for all of this had got what they deserved, she could still not feel at ease. Instead, now that there was no more revenge to exact, she felt purposeless. Furthermore, as the only person involved who was not punished, she felt even more guilt.

"I hope you can help Sleeping Island to get back on the right track," Tilly said after a period of silence. "Like you, the surviving members of the Bloodfang Association were also deceived and framed by Heidi. They should not be implicated and discriminated against. While the combat witches were wrong to bully the assistant witches, it wouldn't be right to bully them in return."



Iffy nodded without too much hesitation and said, "I'm willing to help you, Lady Tilly."

Tilly seemed a little surprised, as though she did not expect Iffy to reply so promptly. "It's great that you're willing."

"What should I do?"

"Talk to the other members of the Bloodfang Association about your story with Annie. I'll tell everyone about Heidi's crime," Tilly replied. "After the church is completely wiped out, I'll send people to Wolfheart to find the witches imprisoned by the noble. If they're still alive, Roland will rescue them."

"I see."

She was determined to do her best in anything that could lighten her sin.

"Are you... alright?" Tilly suddenly stooped down and rubbed Iffy's cheeks. The latter immediately felt a warm feeling spread out across her face.

"I'm fine." She blinked her eyes a few times. "I'm just feeling a little... tired already."

Tilly gazed at her silently for a long while. "Don't be too upset.

Get a good rest."

Iffy only lay down on her bed after the two witches' footsteps could no longer be heard.

She did not cry.

"This is just my body's natural response," she told herself.

It was neither sorrow nor cowardice.

It was simply proof that she missed Annie.

Tears flowed faster and faster.

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Roland sat in front of his desk reading through the Adviser Department's evacuation statistical reports. He had not read under lamplight for a long time and thus felt not used to it. He once thought that he had brought civilization close to modernity, but now in Deepvalley Town, everything was back to square one.

There were no showers, no scented soap, no electric light... this place was not much better than Border Town when he first arrived there. The beginnings of industrialization had only just sprung up in the Western Region. He still had much work to do before chimneys and boilers became common throughout the kingdom.

Roland placed the reports down. Just as he was going to rub his eyes, a soft pair of invisible hands reached out to his forehead and massaged it softly.

"Thanks." He tilted his head and mouthed before he continued to read through the reports.

When Barov was not around, Sir Eltek took up the role of office assistant very well. At least, he did excellently in computing statistics and preparing reports, and was nearly as good as the staff in the city hall who had received specialized training.

"How many people here are willing to go to the Western Region?"

"At least 70 percent, Your Majesty," Eltek replied. "Coldwind Ridge is not really a suitable place to live. I have asked the duke about this, and he told me that if it wasn't to monitor the whereabouts of the church, there wouldn't even be a town there. The remaining 30 percent are mostly people who have their own farmland or factories in the Northern Region."

"Okay, great. You may now begin the planning. Try not to let the ships return empty. Have them bring along a number of people every time, so that more people may go earlier to the Western Region."

"But, over at Duke Calvin's side..."

"I'll explain it to him." Roland drank a mouthful of tea. "Anyway, after the war ends, no matter whether we win or lose, there'll be no need to station people at Coldwind Ridge anymore..."

"What's wrong, Your Majesty?" Eltek asked.

"No... nothing." Just after he said "whether we win or lose", Nightingale abruptly covered his mouth softly so that he held back those words. "Anyway, just do as I say and it'll be fine."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Just as Eltek was about to leave, a personal bodyguard, Sean, opened the door and walked in.

"Your Majesty Roland, there's a woman outside the castle who wants to see you. After she was stopped by the guards, she knelt on the ground and vowed never to leave until she sees you."

"Now?" He subconsciously took a look out of the window. The entire town was in the midst of a quiet night.

"Yes. It seems that she deliberately chose to come at this time. I have seen her twice before in the castle area during daytime. And..." Sean paused and hesitated. "She claims that she's Mrs. Wimbledon."

After hearing this reply, Roland nearly choked on his own saliva. "Impossible!" As far as he knew, the fourth Prince had never been

to the Northern Region before.

When the woman walked into the study, Roland was impressed.

Her looks were not particularly outstanding, but her facial features possessed a peculiar charm. Her small and thin body had an inexplicable sense of steadiness and gentleness about it. To use a common expression, she was obviously not big in size but looked like a very capable housewife. The mud on her long dress even more brought out this blend of femininity and strength.

"Dear Your Majesty." The woman curtsied and greeted. "Olivia of Coldwind Ridge pays her respects."

"May I know what you mean by Mrs. Wimbledon?" Roland went straight to his question. "I heard from my guard that you deliberately waited until night to enter the castle? Are you clear about the consequence of using this name for deception?"

"Pardon me, Your Majesty. If I didn't do so, you won't even see me." She bit her teeth. "I can't be considered your elder brother's real wife, but we were once in love."

As expected, it was just a fraud. "Wait..." Roland suddenly shook. "What did she say? My elder brother?"

"You mean Timothy?"

She shook her head.

"Gerald?"

Olivia's face reddened, and she immediately knelt on the floor. "I know that Gerald had designs on the throne, but he's now dead... Your Majesty, can you please help me on his behalf? I beg you!"

# Chapter 618: A Posthumous Child

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Hearing what Olivia said, Roland could not help sighing with mixed emotions.

It was not a complicated story. When Gerald Wimbledon had served as the commander of the frontier guards, he had made his customary visits to Coldwind Ridge during each year's Months of Demons to assist the church in fighting against demons. In one of his stays here, he had met a bar girl called Olivia in a tavern and fallen in love with her.

Given Olivia's status, it had been impossible for Gerald to marry her or make public their relationship. In the end, he had secretly bought a residence in the town as their love nest. Roland could not judge from the story whether it was true love or not, but he knew from Prince Roland's memories that Gerald had indeed refused marriage alliance with other nobles and had had no other lovers in King's City. As what Gerald had done was quite incredible for an adult prince, there was even a rumor remembered by Prince Roland that Prince Gerald was a homo.

The content of the encrypted letter that was presented by Olivia was even more incredible. According to the bar girl, Gerald had determined to make her his queen, and instead of just paying lip service, he had even written it down. If the written evidence had leaked out, King Wimbledon III would have given Gerald a really hard time.

Good times had not lasted long for Olivia. Quickly after the news that Timothy had sentenced Gerald to death had reached the

Northern Region, her quiet life had come to an end and miseries weighed on her life continuously. The guards left by Gerald had left without saying goodbye and then her house had been burgled. With no source of income, she had had to go back to work as a bar girl in the tavern again.

Yet her bad times was not over. The owner of the tavern was still bitter about her sudden leave before and started to paw her now and then. He even coerced her to sleep with him.

During the most recent six months, Olivia's life was terrible. The owner's wife did not dare to complain in the owner's face, so she vented all her anger on Olivia. The owner often ignored what had happened, and sometimes even joined his wife in bullying and humiliating Olivia.

Roland would never criticize her for being weak-minded, as it was not surprising to him at all that she submitted to the unjust treatment. As a helpless ordinary woman, she had to face the biggest challenge in her life now, which was surviving. As for the disappearance of the guards and the following theft, Roland thought that it was not a coincidence. Given that the thief had been able to break into her house precisely when she had been away and had easily spotted the place where she had hidden her money, it must be an inside job.

"So what can I do for you?" Roland asked Olivia.

He decided to help her. It was not because of Gerald, a person who he had never met and could even be considered a half enemy based on Prince Roland's memory, but because Roland just wanted



to help this remarkable woman who had endured such a misfortune but still waited patiently for a chance to save herself.

Besides, for Roland now, helping her was a simple task.

He did not covet his elder brother's wife as one would expect.

He swore!

"I want to leave the tavern... Your Majesty. Could you find a new job for me?" Olivia answered in a low voice.

"Are you sure you still want to stay in the Northern Region? If the owner of the tavern can't forget about you, he won't let you off easily. You can go to the Western Region by ship. You'll get a job, food and even a house there," Roland said while spreading out his hands. He did not want to degrade himself by getting involved in a civil dispute like this.

After a little hesitation, Olivia replied in an even lower voice, "Your Majesty... I, I want to stay here."

"I think she's afraid of you. As an ordinary woman, she's at least half as beautiful as Edith. It makes sense for the tavern owner to drool over her," Nightingale whispered in Roland's ear.

Roland said in silence, "Nonsense." After talking to Nightingale with the lip language, he nodded to Olivia and said, "Alright, I'll tell Duke Calvin to fetch you to City of Evernight. It's getting late

now, Sean can find a hotel for you to sleep tonight."

"I shall never forget your kindness, Your Majesty." She knelt down again and said, "But... I have to go back tonight."

"It's up to you," Roland raised his eyebrow and said. He turned to Sean and ordered. "Give this lady a ride."

When Olivia reached the door, Roland suddenly asked, "By the way, do you have... any child with Gerald?"

She seemed startled and after a while answered, "I'm sorry, Your Majesty... I didn't have any child to carry on his family name."

...

After she left with the guard, Nightingale stepped out of the Mist and said, "Her last sentence is a lie."

"Uhm, I know." Roland twitched his mouth and said. "She isn't a good liar, and that explains why she was forced by the tavern owner."

"For the kid?"

"The owner must know that it was Prince Gerald Wimbledon who took her away. He was also clear about what would happen to the kid if Timothy found out the truth. To protect the kid she had

with Gerald, she had to do what the owner wanted. I'd guess that's probably the case."

"Do you need me to investigate it for you?" Nightingale asked.

Roland stared at Nightingale for a long time and then summoned up a meaningful smile gradually curl his lips. He said, "Are you worried that I'm planning to bury this secret forever like Timothy? Relax, I won't harm innocent people. Even the family members of Duke Ryan are still under a house arrest in City of Neverwinter."

A feudal ruler would spare no one in his enemy's family but Roland did not like this idea of collective punishment, let alone killing a bastard child of a civilian woman, who apparently was not a threat to the throne.

"No matter what you say, I'll carry out your commands," Nightingale said slowly.

"I see. Well... give me a massage now," Roland took her hand and placed it on his shoulder and said.

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Olivia went back to her wooden cabin which was built for immigrants. Her footsteps woke up the sleeping baby.

"Wah-wah-wah."

The baby cried.

The tavern owner's wife immediately started to shout in the next room. "Damn it, make him shut up! Otherwise, I'll put him down in the toilet and dump him into Soundless River!"

"I, I'm sorry. I'll quiet him down right away."

Neglecting the coolness of the night in Deepvalley Town, Olivia hurriedly took off her dirt-stained dress and held the baby in her arms. The baby instantly pressed close to her, skillfully searching for the nipple.

She finally let out a sigh of relief.

She felt lucky, as she was right about the tavern owner who had not come back yet.

Since they left Coldwind Ridge, he had become more and more ill-tempered. He spent most of his time in the local taverns and gambling houses, and seldom touched her. That was why Olivia had the chance to slip out of the cabin in the evening to ask Gerald's younger brother for help.

She did not dare to tell Roland that she had a child with Gerald or to go to the Western Region which was under complete control of the king. She was afraid that His Majesty would not want this child to exist. When that happened, she would be unable to protect her

child anymore.

Olivia gently touched the baby's head. In the dim moonlight, she could see gray hair on his head, which was the feature of the Wimbledon family.

She felt it was a great pity that Gerald had not got the chance to meet his own child. She had not known that she was pregnant with the prince's child until she had received his letter in Coldwind Ridge.

After being fed, the baby happily hummed and fell asleep again.

Olivia lowered her head to kiss the baby on his forehead.

She made up her mind to raise him up alone, no matter what she had to sacrifice.

# Chapter 619: An Unstoppable Path (Part I)

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The red bricks and gray tiles of the cathedral gradually came into Isabella's sight, as her ship was slowly approaching the old Holy City.

It looked fairly prosaic. Unlike the new cathedral on the plateau, it did not have a magnificent chapel or a lofty building similar to the Tower of Babel. It might even be smaller than the churches located in the capitals of the Four Kingdoms. Despite that, in the heart of most believers, this old cathedral together with the cloisters, the Hall of Military Affairs and the Hall of Arbitration formed the palace of deities on the ground.

They considered this old cathedral the source of the church and the beginning of everything.

Isabella, however, rejected this saying.

She knew that the real place of origin for the church located inside the high mountains behind the old cathedral and that the truth was always kept as a secret from the believers.

As for the old Holy City?

It was just built to cover the secret.

After the sailing ship was anchored off by the dock, Isabella walked down the trestle bridge alone with light bags. Seeing this,

the guard who came from Pivotal Secret Area to fetch her was taken by surprise and asked, "My Lady, where are the other pure witches?"

"They'll come one or two days later. I know His Holiness is rushing for us to return, but they still need some time to make some arrangements," she shrugged and replied.

"But Lady Zero said..."

"She wanted to see everyone." Isabella interrupted the guard. "I knew, but she didn't say that she wanted to see all of us at the same time."

She was puzzled by the recall order. Requiring all the pure witches to come back to Holy City would apparently ruin the plan to control Kingdom of Dawn. Without the medicine, the king would die in endless sleep. She could not think of a reason for Zero's abrupt change of plan, nor did she receive any explanation in the order.

"She's getting more and more like a real pope," Isabella thought, feeling a little unhappy.

Nevertheless, she had to still hit the road as soon as she had received the command. It had taken her a whole week to rush back to Hermes.

She turned around to ask the guard while boarding the cart, "By

the way, do you know what happened in Holy City?"

"The advance force of the church fought a battle against the army of Kingdom of Graycastle at the foot of Coldwind Ridge," the guard hesitated for a while and answered, "and I think you'd better ask Lady Zero for the details."

"Did... the advance force lose?"

The guard slightly nodded to her without saying anything. He quickly left to mount a war-horse and then shouted to the coachman, "Let's go!"

Inside the carriage, Isabella let the curtains down and she was lost in her thought.

There were certainly many God's Punishment Warriors in the advance force, as top leaders of the church only reacted when there's a heavy loss to God's Punishment Army.

God's Punishment Warriors aren't immortals. They'll also suffer from heavy casualties, facing the harms more than they can bear. Since the church launched the attack at Kingdom of Everwinter, Holy City has already lost nearly 100 of them. I thought Zero had already got used to this situation, but maybe I was wrong. What a heavy loss could it be in this battle, which led to Zero's decision to recall all the pure witches.

The coach traveled through the busy streets of the old Holy City



and came to a battalion near the cliffs of the Impassable Mountain Range. Like the cathedral, this place was also heavily secured. Isabella got off the coach and stepped into a tunnel which was cut into the cliffs. She passed through many iron gates, walking into the mountain.

In the cold light of the God's Stone prism, the towering silhouette of Pivotal Secret Temple was presented in front of her.

Guided by the guard, she directly went up to the library on the top floor. When she opened the door of the circular hall, the present pope was standing by the window and looking out, who seemed lost in thought.

"What's this sticky business that makes you forget about Kingdom of Dawn?" Isabella came up to Zero and whistled to her. "No matter what it is, why don't we leave Gentlewoman and Blackveil there to stabilize the situation?"

Zero did not answer her question. Instead, she pointed down to the people, asking, "What do you think they look like?"

Isabella frowned and asked, "Is that related to what I'm asking?"

Zero ignored Isabella's question again and said, "Those humble, ignorant people are on the go all day long without knowing what for, just like ants. Maybe that's also how deities think of us... We devote ourselves to bloody wars and then die on the battlefields, knowing nothing about the cause of this situation. Only standing on the top will give one a view of the whole world. Fortunately,

now I get one more step closer to Divine Will again."

"What... is your point?"

"As long as I can devour the new king of Kingdom of Graycastle, my chance of winning the Battle of Divine Will will significantly increase." Zero smiled, her eyes were shining with an unusual excitement. "I somehow feel that... it's deities who send him to me."

After a moment of silence, Isabella said in a deep voice, "I just want to know how many God's Punishment Warriors were killed in the battle at the foot of Coldwind Ridge."

"150 were killed on the battlefield and 11 died on the way back to Hermes. However, the enemy hadn't even got a scratch. Neither big shields nor spear throwers could break through the defense line of Roland's army," Zero said while staring at Isabella with her gleaming eyes.

Isabella's heart vibrated in a sudden and her mind was in a tumult. "How come the God's Punishment Army suffered even a heavier loss in this single battle than it did in the battles during the Months of Demons and the actions of capturing Kingdom of Everwinter and Kingdom of Wolfheart? What makes the Prince of Kingdom of Graycastle so incredibly powerful?"

The witches? The knights? No, not them. Even a mountainous Fearful Beast of Hell will die when it's besieged by God's Punishment Warriors. How did he manage to do this?

"A dreadful snow powder weapon," Zero said as if she saw through Isabella's mind. "Even mortals could operate this kind of weapons. They could shoot targets a thousand steps away. They broke the armors plates and iron shields, and they're firing non-stop. Our warriors became easy targets for them."

After hearing the process of the battle, Isabella took a deep breath and the look on her face was uncertain. After a long while, she said, "So, you've lost."

"It's indeed a defeat for the church, and Soli Daal took the enemy too lightly..."

Isabella suddenly interrupted and said, "No, I didn't mean the battle. Do you remember? You told me only the winner was the deities' chosen one, and now you're clearly not the one."

"You think... Roland Wimbledon is the one who can win the Divine's Smile instead of me?" Zero peacefully asked.

Isabella could not help but raise her voice, arguing, "Don't forget about our goal! We must defeat the demons in order to enable mankind to survive. I don't care whether the church is the one to realize that goal! Given what happened during that battle, it's clear that even if you pool all your strength to defeat and devour Roland, it'll do no good to our goal. His army and witches will be slaughtered, God's Punishment Army will also suffer a heavy loss and in less than half a year Months of Demons will arrive again!"

For one split second, Isabella thought Zero was going to kill her, but Zero did not react until she finished.

"So what do you want me to do?"

The pope asked softly after a long silence.

## Chapter 620: An Unstoppable Path (Part II)

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"Tell Roland Wimbledon our goal, the truth about Battles of Divine Will during this 400 years and the secret of the church... No, I mean secret of the Witch Union," Isabella said explicitly.

Since Zero became the pope, all the pure witches who belonged to the Pivotal Secret Temple had been able to come to this library and know the true facts about Battles of Divine Will.

"What if he doesn't believe us?"

"He will! Bring him to the Illusion Room in the Reflection Church. He'll believe everything we say!"

"Or, he'll consider it a trick of the witches. Are you sure he'll devote all his time to fighting demons, once he knows the truth about the Union?" Zero said slowly.

Isabella was stunned. She opened her mouth but failed to say anything.

"Both of us know those nobles very well. They're interested the most in expanding their domains, increasing their wealth and enjoying their lives. Maybe they'll lead their people to fight against demons when the Bloody Moon arrives, but how can you be sure that the dandy prince will fight till death facing an adverse forecast?"

Zero held Isabella's hand and walked with her to the roundtable at the side and continued, "Isabella, he's just a fragile, weak mortal. His life is short and his willpower will vanish as time goes on. A common cold plague can easily end his life. Even if he believes in us and chooses to fight to his death against demons with the Union, nobody can promise that his people and successors will do the same thing. Are they willing to give up all their comforts and pool all resources of the kingdom to fight such an endless, brutal war? Only the church can do this, as our believers have a strong faith in deities and in us."

"At least... We should first send a messenger to talk to him."

Zero shook her head and said, "Negotiations can't solve problems like this. Indeed, devouring Roland will cause heavy loss to Hermes, but giving in to a secular lord will also crumble the people's belief in the church and destroy Holy City. Roland won't spare us or our God's Punishment Army as a way of stabilizing his own witch organization. These two choices aren't very different in terms of the outcome. Given that, why do you rest your hope on a mortal man?"

Isabella hesitated.

She saw the point of Zero's argument. Fighting against the prince would probably lead to a lose-lose scenario, but surrendering to him could not prevent Roland from seeking revenge for his witches. If he did so, the church would pay a heavy price and things seemed to return to the beginning.

Zero continued to say, "The knowledge of weapons isn't exclusive

to a mortal, but a mortal can never have a body like that of a witch. Winning each Battle of Souls, I'll get my opponents' knowledge and lifespan. I'll stay energetic and determined for all my life and I'll be able to prevent our efforts from being ruined by later generations, no matter how long Battle of Divine Will will last. In the past 200 years, I've witnessed too many talented people being consumed by the time. No matter how brave and brilliant they were when they were young, they would become dust in the end. This fact alone suggests that I'm much better than him."

"But..."

"And most importantly, I'm the deities' chosen one, Isabella. No matter who's my opponent, I've never lost a battle. Thousands of souls absorbed by me can testify!" Zero emphasized the fact that could not be controverted.

Isabella heaved a long sigh.

She was persuaded.

"Well, what's your plan? If we can't get close enough to him, I can't eliminate the effect of God's Stone of Retaliation for you."

"Don't forget about High-Level Sigils left by the Union," Zero answered with a chuckle.

"No one can use 'Divine Will'... and 'Infinite' is a one-time sigil. Are you sure that you're going to use it for this?" Isabella said,

frowning.

"It'll turn the tables on Roland. It's not a waste to use it on ordinary people or demons, as long as it can ensure our victory," Zero said with finality.

"I'll exhaust all my magic power. It's not a good feeling at all," Isabella twitched her mouth and said.

Zero nodded, adding, "And, you'll faint. Yet it won't do any harm to your body. Once I can approach Roland Wimbledon, the war will end soon."

"If you lose, we're finished."

Zero disapproved Isabella's guess, saying, "I never lose. When you wake up, you should be lying in the bedroom of the cathedral."

With these words, Zero poured a cup of red tea for Isabella and comforted her. "I know you're still hesitating, but don't forget you're raised by me. I chose you as His Holiness O'Brien's pure witch after your awakening and taught you knowledge and combat skills. You know my strength and my determination to defeat demons better than anyone. Generally speaking, I'm the better one to lead human beings in the coming Battle of Divine Will."

"Well... I hope so.," Isabella took a sip of tea and said, "but according to the books, 'Infinite' is not really limitless, and the magic power can only remain effective for a short time when



you're in the soul form. If you fail to catch him, you won't have another chance."

"So what we need to do first is to find him," Zero said with a smile.

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"Finish reloading!"

"Angle 22, pitch 13, fire!"

Immediately after the order, the 152mm Stronghold Cannon set at the very back of the battle line gushed out bright orange flames and a strong airflow which kicked up the dirt and dust in the front into the air. Roland could still hear the deep roar of the cannon with his ears plugged.

The soldiers were tiptoeing and stretched their necks to look at the distant mountains, but they still could not see the falling point this time.

"This is Lightning speaking, the shell landed at... almost the middle part of the slope." The little girl's report came to him through the Sigil of Listening.

"Good, mark it down," Roland replied.

He was busy with directing a long-range shooting amending of two new fatal weapons, he started after all the residents of Coldwind Ridge left. As it cost a lot to make these ultra-long-range cannons, he won't let his artillerymen shoot them after spotting the enemy, thus creating the first beyond visual range strike in this era.

Roland was clear that he could not rely on the soldiers to correct the angle of the cannon according to the position of the target, so he used this basic shooting amending method. He recorded the point of fall and angles of the cannon for each shooting after the shell landed on the slope. With these recordings, Lightning would report the file number to the artillerymen once she found enemy stepping into the shooting range of the cannon in a battle, and then the artillerymen would adjust the cannon accordingly and fire directly.

These two Stronghold Cannons were enough to give a crushing blow to the enemy when they were moving down the mountain.

# Chapter 621: Sleepless Night

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"This is simply... God's Punishment." Iron Axe sighed. "They can only be passively attacked as they can't even see the shadow of their opponents. There's no way for the ordinary enemies to complete the mountain path with the gunfire on their heads."

Witnessing the power of howitzer, the chief commander of the First Army naturally knew the amazing effect when it fell within a densely gathered marching platoon. The first shell landed as far as five kilometers away in front of the battlefield. The enemy was running madly throughout the way, or consuming all their energy before the war, or moving forward fearlessly with the incomplete platoon to the battlefield. Of course, the most likely scenario was dispersing in an uproar and turning into escape instead of marching in.

"Unfortunately all the enemy we have to face is not normal," Roland smiled and said, "and not to mention that there's only a limited amount of shells, otherwise, we can easily wipe out the enemy with the two Longsong Cannons."

As Longsong Cannon was firing with the complete ammunition, the firing speed was as high as eight shots per minute. The firing efficiency could definitely be considered as an absolute insanity in this era. Since the alchemist from King's City moved into Neverwinter with a large batch of apprentices, the production of double base propellant had been rising steadily, and the number of shells had become the biggest limitation—the fuze trigger could only be manually produced by Anna currently, and its extremely precise mechanical structure had restricted the production of howitzer.

"Your Majesty, all the 20 cannons have been completely fired," Van'er, the battalion commander reported after several repeating fires. "A total of six valid target data was obtained, and most of them were roughly distributed in the second half of the mountain road."

"That's good. That's all for today." Roland nodded.

Afterall, the test shells required customized production. Although it was utilizing the solid bullet, the shape and counterweight were exactly like the grenade with the fuze installed—only Anna could handle such an exquisite task, so she would make time to produce a certain amount of test bullets every day for the Artillery Battalion test shooting purposes.

"Do you need to go anywhere else to have a look?" Iron Axe asked.

"No, I'll go back to the camp first, and you continue to arrange the training for the soldiers," Roland contemplated for a moment before he shook his head and said.

"Yes, Your Majesty," he bowed and said.

Returning to the campsite, Roland sighed extensively while leaning back against the couch. He realized that there was nothing much left for him to do, or perhaps, he had done what he could and the rest could only depend on the fate.

The church finally responded five days ago. According to Maggie's report, the city door of Holy City was opened, and countless men and horses gushed out from the city, heading towards Coldwind Ridge in an orderly line. Looking down from the sky, the shining silver armors of the warriors looked like a river of striking waving light flowing through the Impassable Mountain Range.

At the same time, the spy placed around the area of the old Holy City and Hermes highlands had sent a secret letter, stating that the scale of action of the church was unprecedented, even the crowd in the city activities was dramatically decreased.

Obviously, the enemy was swarming over.

After receiving the news, Roland immediately rushed to the front line. And his arrival had boosted the morale of the First Army to the maximum, the war that decided the future of both parties was approaching.

There were more than 4,000 elite soldiers: one team of reserved knights offered by Duke of the Northern Region, the preliminary investigation group organized by Lightning and Maggie, Sylvie's fire guide that never missed, and the combat witch who scattered around the campsite. It should be a complete preparation. Even the movement of the church was totally in accordance with the battle plan formulated by the Adviser Department, and the residents in Coldwind Ridge were evacuated. Thus, even if the enemy intended to use Berserk Pills, they would only consume the believers in Holy City or the forced residents in the other kingdom.

The opening was considered pretty perfect.

However, Roland was a little worried.

He was worried about the pure witches.

It was still unknown for the form they would appear to be and in what capacity would they intervene in this battle.

In order to prevent the casualties caused by the enemy's sneak attack, the witches in the front line had to be very cautious these few days. They were all gathered in a hall. Sylvie and Nightingale were divided into two groups to take a turn on night watch. The entire camp would be awakened by Echo's siren once the magic reaction was encountered.

As a result, the church had not taken any further action other than sending soldiers to take over Coldwind Ridge. Roland did not even see any pure witch.

He was not sure whether the enemy was planning an earth-shattering conspiracy, or simply disdained to disturb, and planning to crushed him into pieces on the official battlefield.

Anyway, all he could do now was to continue to wait.

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Roland was lying on the bed early after dinner. However, he could not fall asleep until the bright moonlight was shining through the window slit onto his bedside. He put on his clothes and walked out of the bedroom. Nightingale who was staying outside the house immediately flashed over to him.

"Is there anything wrong, unable to fall asleep?"

"Slightly, it's probably due to too much straw below the bed." Roland rubbed his neck and pulled out a wheat leave from his clothes. "It feels like something is poking my back when I lie on it."

"I feel the same." Andrea who was on the same early midnight team agreed. "Not to mention moving a big comfortable bed over but at least it should be layered with two extra silk pads. Duke of the Northern Region is too stingy."

"Ladies and gentlemen, we're at war, not on an outing," Ashes angrily said, "It's considered good to have a shelter, don't be so demanding."

"Of course, it makes no difference for someone who has thick and rough skin."

"It's better than being weak and fragile."

"I think we'll need to have another duel to see who the weak and fragile one is."

"You'll understand after we finish with the church."

"Hold on... Can I place a bet?" Shavi put her hand up and said.

Nightingale pulled Roland aside and said, "Don't bother about them, it's a nightly routine."

Roland shook his head while smiling. "I would not put them together if I knew it earlier." Due to the fact that Nightingale's scope of investigation was far smaller than that of Sylvie, the combat mission of the early midnight team was handed over to the three poker players group. They would be the strongest offensive group with Nightingale. While those who were arranged for the late midnight team were mainly defensive-based. The members were Agatha, Breeze and Iffy, no one could manage and block the enemy better. "What about the others? Can they adapt?" Roland asked.

"Sisters from Witch Cooperation Association aren't as picky as you are," Nightingale blinked and said, "and they had experienced the days without shelter and food during their escape, so they could simply close their eyes and fall sleep in this situation."

"Well, looks like I'm the most impatient one..." Roland sat on the step and kept quiet for quite a while, looking up at the stars and finally said, "What will we do when all these come to an end?"

Nightingale sat beside him and said, "You're getting nervous, aren't you?"



Roland touched his nose in guilt and said, "I'm just being a little emotional. If we can't defeat the church..." He then thought, " Will Neverwinter continue to run under the current order? Will the kingdom be completely devoured by the church, or will it return to the previous path of the noble ownership? And what about Anna and the rest of the witches... Can they really safely flee to Sleeping Islands?"

He had devoted to forging the land and developed a strong feeling towards the people unconsciously.

"Don't worry," Nightingale held onto his hand and softly said. "As I mentioned before... You won't be hurt as long as I'm still alive," she paused and said, "not to mention that our story has just started."

# Chapter 622: The Flames of Thunder

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Roland had just come to the command post with his breakfast when he received Maggie's report in the next morning.

"The church is on the way, coo!" Her nervous voice could be heard from the magic stone. "A team has left Coldwind Ridge and it's moving forward to the defense line, coo!"

"How many of them?"

"One, two, three... five of them in total!"

Roland who was preparing for the frontline battle conference sat back down and said, "What? Five?"

"They're dressed in shimmery armors, holding the Holy City's flag up high. What a show-off, coo! Do I need to report to the cannon markers?"

"Uh... No, you just continue to keep an eye on what Coldwind Ridge will do." Roland put the bread into his mouth, wondering, "What's the church thinking?"

"They're probably coming to beg for mercy?" Nightingale twitched her lips and said.

"If this is the case, the church shouldn't send the army to invade

Coldwind Ridge." Roland frowned.

One and a half day later, the platoon reached the frontline of defense. The priest who led the troop claimed that they were the emissary delegation sent by the church to meet with Roland, His Majesty. At the same time, there was a hand-written letter from Supreme Pontiff for the young King of Kingdom of Graycastle.

"What do you think?" Roland gathered the Adviser Department and the witches, and asked, "Could it be a trick of the pure witches?"

"I'd like to ask for your thought before this," Edith spoke, "Will you accept their peace negotiation if the church wants to surrender?"

Roland rejected the possibility without any hesitation, "Unless they dismiss the God's Punishment Army and bring all the senior management and those who kill the innocent to trial. However, I don't think the church will accept this term."

"Indeed," Edith instantly answered, "In this case, you shouldn't meet the emissary delegation. Not to mention if there's any conspiracy, the negotiation process may affect your determination."

"I agree with you." Agatha nodded. "Even though there's no magic reaction on five of them but the witch's ability is very strange, no one can be sure what's going to happen next."

"Perhaps we should just capture them for interrogation and get rid of them secretly after we know the actual purpose of them coming here," Iron Axe made a cut-throat gesture and said.

"Your Majesty, Kingdom of Graycastle isn't Iron Sand City," Sir Eltek quickly advised, "It's better not to do so, it's going to ruin your reputation when the news spread."

"I know." Roland contemplated for a while and looked at Iron Axe. "Get them to leave the letter and send them off."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Roland could not help but wonder. "What would the supreme ruler of Hermes say?"

"Is that going to be an advice or an inducement?"

After several inspections by Sylvie and Agatha, the hand-written letter by the Pope of Holy City had finally reached Roland.

Opening up the exquisite cover, the handwriting on the letter was surprisingly graceful.

And the content of the letter surprised Roland.

He described the origins and purpose of the church in an honest note and revealed the existence of the great enemy of mankind—

the demon.

If he did not know the four-hundred years old secret before this, the content was probably enough to make him confused and inconceivable.

Is this the strategy of the enemy?

Confusing the opponent with the dust-laden history truth and taking it as the sincerity for peace negotiation?

As a result, after the first platoon returned, Coldwind Ridge sent another platoon of soldiers. And there were also five of them.

Of course, Roland did not meet up with them as well but asked them to simply leave the letter behind instead.

The content of the letter was more in-depth this time, and it had mentioned the Battle of Divine Will other than the brief introduction of the Union before the church was formed—the pope believed that the 400-years cycle battle of the different races was a deities ' test towards the mankind.

Roland was contemptuous towards this idea but he could feel a slight uneasiness in his heart.

Coldwind Ridge had continuously delegated several emissary delegation troops to send a few hand-written letters by Pope to the frontline battalion within a week time after that. The letters did

not reveal too much new information, and the content was getting shorter and shorter. Roland simply turned a blind eye to the suggestion to combine the efforts from both sides to confront the demon which was written behind the letter.

The church only stopped sending any new messenger when the hot summer days arrived.

The enemy had come in full force this time.

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"This is Lightning, the enemy has entered the ninth zone! Repeat, the enemy has entered the ninth zone!"

Hearing the voice that came out from the Sigil, Cat's Claw nervously flipped through the booklet in his hand. "Uh... Ninth, ninth..."

"Quick!" Rodney shouted, "The shell is already installed!"

"It's already at the fastest speed!" Cat's Claw shouted, "Ah... It's here, angle 26, pitch 15!"

Nelson quickly swang the handle. "26... 15, complete!"

"Ready to shoot!"

Cat's Claw quickly covered his ears upon hearing the order.

"Fire!"

Jop quickly pulled the matchlock, the 152cm Longsong Cannon instantly issued a stirring roar, the sound wave mixed with the air flow blowing in the face. it was like a hammer beating on the chest of the Cat's Claw, making his blood boil. He could feel the ground below his feet started to tremble under the activation of the huge recoil.

"This is power," Cat's Claw thought to himself, "Longsong Cannon is the weapon that's more suitable for the men to operate, comparing to the 12 pounds small metal pipe."

The only regret was that he was not able to see the scene when the shell landed.

Acting boldly, Cat's Claw came close to the Magic Stone in Leaf's hand and said, "Uh... Miss Lightning, did we hit the target?"

"Ah ha... Nicely hit," the little girl replied.

...

Comparing to the rear cannon operator, Lightning and Maggie could observe the enemy's movements and strikes taken more directly.

Lightning was floating at an absolute safe height and looking down with the telescope in her hand. She realized that the howitzer launched just now fell on the west area of the ninth zone about four meters deviated from the estimated falling point. It was probably due to the change of wind. However the actual effect was not too bad. The mighty army of the church had filled the entire mountain path. Given that, a scarlet flower would instantly blossom as long as the shell fell on top of the army.

It was just like the previous hit.

She could not see the entire process of the flight of the shell until the landing. The first thing that came into her eyes was the dark red light, following by the highly-sprung dust and gravel and a fleeting ripple spreading from the light, leaving a trail of dust. The sound of the explosion would not be heard until a while later as if both did not happen at the same time.

When the smoke was blown away, the shell's point of fall was left with a burned black mark, and around it was a hideous mess of dead bodies; the residual limbs could be seen everywhere, and the sticky blood and organs had dyed the shiny armors with a touch of bright red color. The Judgement Warriors at a further distance looked totally different, and there were no obvious wounds on their bodies, but they were still spitting out blood and fell on the floor. Some of them could still walk for a few meters before falling, and the crooked way they walked made them looked as if they were drunk.

Only one shelling could cause the church to lose nearly 50 men.



Lightning was waving her fist happily and said, "You deserve it!"

And she shifted her gaze to the next shelling zone.

"Attention, the enemy is passing through the twelfth zone, please fire, repeat, please fire!"

# Chapter 623: Battle to the death

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Under the artillery bombardment, the church disorganized and gradually separated, while the God's Punishment Warriors, who were unaffected, hastened their advance and left the Judgement Army behind.

Suddenly, Lightning noticed a strange scene.

A rider dressed as a priest, shining with yellow light, quickly traversed the rugged hill road from behind and stabilized the scattered army again. The army proceeded along with the rider's guidance. This time, instead of being lined up in orderly rows, they were dispersed so that the later grenades failed to achieve the first significant results.

That was a pure witch.

She was preparing to arrange two cannons to attack the area where the pure witch of the church would soon pass, when she heard Maggie screaming.

"Careful!"

Lightning suddenly pulled her figure more than 10 meters upward, before a swarm of locusts passed beneath her feet like a brown cloud.

After failing to attack, they twisted together to form the vague

appearance of a man. "Rotten bastards, how dare you to go against the church? Go to hell!"

"Maggie, continue to guide the cannons!" Lightning pulled down the windbreak, pointed a pistol at the swarm and said, "Killing compatriots make you feel so glorious? Go die!"

...

Enemies entered Danny's vision. This time they had many more warriors than previously. The misty mountains were covered by the sheen of armors. The God's Punishment Warriors did not use the tactic of a slow forward covered by shields, but rather charged right from the beginning.

Looking at the ocean of rushing enemies, he could feel their great momentum. His sweaty palms made his gun sticky. He had only seen this scene on the wall when the Months of Demons came, thousands of demonic beasts, regardless of death, insanely charged at the walls. Anything in their way would be ruthlessly torn apart. But now, the First Army was facing enemies more powerful than the demonic beasts.

But Danny did not fear it. The demonic beasts could not break that low stone wall that the Militia was fighting atop of, and now the corps of the church would be barricaded by the First Army's defense in flesh!

What was more, the woman he wanted to protect was just behind their position.

When Danny stepped into the trenches in the morning, he saw a familiar figure in green that turned around and smiled at him. Despite knowing that it was out of courtesy, that smiling face was still like a blooming flower bud rooted in his heart.

He had never thought that she would come with Roland to this battleground.

Anyway, he would not allow the enemy to break through the line of defense.

It was a pity that Lord Iron Axe expelled him from the precision shooting team after he violated military discipline. If his weapon had not been replaced with a revolving rifle or he would have taught the God's Punishment Army a lesson.

"They just crossed the 300-meter line!" Malt reported the distance of the enemies. "Spear throwers!"

"I see it." Danny patted the little man on the head. "Take care of yourself."

Malt, who was the victim of his own actions, after his injuries had healed, was demoted back down to normal flintlocks. However since he was an accomplice, rather than confinement, the commander-in-chief was lenient and only docked him a month's salary.

The truth was that this time the enemy's offensive charge was so rapid that four machine gun forts failed to completely suppress the God's Punishment Army. As dust in the wake of the God's Punishment Army and smoke from the field artilleries filled the air, several loopholes in the interlaced fire network appeared.

The God's Punishment Army soldiers that rushed ahead crossed the musketeers' red warning line.

"200-meter line, throwing spear!"

"Lie down!"

"Lie yourself down!"

Continuous cries came from the trenches. Danny shot all five bullets in a round at a stretch and then fell down to the ground. At the same time, he reloaded the gun. After the attack of the spears, he got up and pulled the trigger, firing toward the nearest enemy.

At that distance, revolving rifles were as powerful as the new weapons. Danny could almost see the stony faces of the God's Punishment Warriors which looked as if the surrounding artillery and gunfire had nothing to do with them. Until a bullet penetrated the God's Punishment Warrior's chest and neck and blew his head, did he tremble to stop and spray the blue blood.

As more and more enemies crossed the line of fire, Danny quickly used up three preloaded cartridges. According to the

predetermined plan, he quickly brought a gun to the second trench.

Just as he got into the trench and saw his teammates, a black shadow fell from the sky. Suddenly a God's Punishment Warrior jumped up and crossed the barbed wire in front of the trench waving a big sword to split him apart!

"Run!!!" He caught Malt behind him and pulled him to his bosom.

There was a loud noise!

Danny suddenly felt that his hand was numb and fell down.

When he opened his eyes, Malt, who was in his arms, was cut off at the waist.

Malt watched him, with his mouth open. He spat blood but could not speak anymore.

Danny felt a buzz in his brain and shouted, but the God's Punishment Warrior had already rushed over him. Danny's arms were sliced off and his face was nearly split by the God's Punishment Warriors.

Suddenly Danny could even see the rough blade, stained with his blood.

Just as he thought he was going to die, another cold light flashed in his eyes. The two swords rubbed burst into flame and the God's Punishment Warrior's weapon was dropped to the ground!

A woman with a long black ponytail that hung down to her waist and eyes flashing with a golden light appeared above the tunnel like an insurmountable mountain.

The God's Punishment Warrior that lost his swords did not flinch at all and punched to at her.

In an instant, he fell to the ground dead. Without any resistance, his head was crushed.

The blue-white mixture splashed on Danny's face.

"Let's go."

She glanced at the frightened soldiers and spat out her words coldly before engaging the other two God's Punishment Warriors that had rushed over.

"This guy is hurt!"

"Get him out of here!"

"With Malt," Danny said in a hoarse voice, hugging the little man in what was left of his arms.

"He's dead!" Someone shouted. "Do you want to kill us all?"

The teammates behind him grabbed his severed arms and pulled him towards the back of the trench as the lifeless Malt gradually disappeared from Danny's vision.

...

Lightning flew to the back of the swarm at full speed and pulled the trigger.

She had figured out the details of the enemy. Killing every insect in the swarm would be an arduous task, and the pure witch had already lost some magic, especially given that Maggie metamorphosed into the natural enemy of the locusts, a swallow. Maggie kept herding the swarm over and forced it into a ball before pulling out a pistol shooting it. Finally a vicious curse and then a roar entered her ears.

The pure witch could not survive for too long.

When Lightning was to about to withdraw and reload, the locusts suddenly turned around and rushed toward the ground.

"Maggie!"

Cried the little girl.



"Owh!"

Goshawk folded her eagle wings and swooped down to the swarm below with her ferocious mouth.

"What's this? It's... impossible!" The sound of the locusts turned into a cry. It wanted to turn around to escape but it was too late.

Maggie swallowed the swarm effortlessly and chewed twice. "Terrible!"

Lightning shrugged and stuck her pistol in her belt. "Because they aren't roasted or seasoned."

Until then, she had not noticed that there were more bloodstains on her body. During the first explorations, she came into contact with the swarm several times and the teeth of these locusts were like hard rasps. If they were ordinary people maybe they would not easily avoid this flexible attack.

Looking at the camp covered with craters and corpses, Lightning took a deep breath. "We don't need artillery guidance here. Let's support His Majesty."

"Awh!"

# Chapter 624: Devastation

---

"This is an absolute slaughter."

Nail thought sitting on the top of the tower, hands on his machine gun grip.

As long as the trigger was depressed, this steel weapon would keep spouting out the flames and shoot bullets toward the enemies. The position targeted by this weapon would be covered by the death of the network; where all lives would become fragmented like fallen bowls from the table.

Being able to dominate the battlefield from such a high position left him feeling passionate.

So did his comrades in his team.

"The 66th! Look, that poor guy has been disintegrated."

"What're you counting? That's obviously the 68th!"

"Look over there, a guy is still rolling on the ground. Just kill him."

"His intestines have already spilled out, save your ammunition and let him slowly struggle!"

With a click, the fabric tape slipped down and another box of bullets had come to its end.

"Cover the third trench. I'm going to reload!" Nail cried to a machine gun team in the tower.

"Don't worry, and just leave it to us."

His teammates quickly brought over a box full of bullets. He put on a single thick glove and gripped the smoking barrel of the machine gun with a special caliper. He held the pipe with one hand, disassembled it easily, and placed it lightly in the open space.

According to the requirements of training, soldiers could not fire continuously except under extraordinary conditions. So the barrel must be replaced after a box of bullets was shot to avoid barrel deformation with overheating. It was said that this kind of black steel pipe which could fit the thread of the gun chamber perfectly was made by the witch, Miss Anna. Every pipe cost about 50 gold royals, which made the team members treat their guns like their children.

After they installed the cooled barrels, the jarring percussive sound once again rang out from the tower.

"Look, there's a witch in the east of the first trench!"

Suddenly a cry rang out around him.

"That's not a witch, idiot! That's a pure witch, Miss Nana's enemies!"

Nail also saw the target his teammate pointed out.

The woman in a red robe might have been hit on the leg by a flying bullet. She was on the ground and slowly crawling forward. The robe behind her dragged a light blood stain.

He aimed the gun at the pure witch but a feeling left him feeling a little overwhelmed and he did not pull the trigger.

From her figure, she looked as though she may have not yet grown up.

"Shoot, what're you waiting for?"

"I..."

A string of sand quickly swept over her body the moment he hesitated.

She stopped struggling and blood spread from her belly, like a small red flower.

"Hell, we just lost a result!"

"Stop saying that." Another one interrupted him while patting Nail on the shoulder. "You're tired, leave it to me."

He took a deep breath and said, "No, I'm fine."

Nail recomposed himself.

This was a war with the church. Regardless of age, the enemy was the enemy and they were still not strong enough. Nail secretly clenched his teeth and left his compassion behind him.

"Wait, what happened in the middle of the third trench?" The observer in another team suddenly exclaimed. "The ground collapsed?"

"My god, what's that?"

"Damn... pure witches! More than one, just kill them!"

Nail quickly turned the gun and saw a square pit suddenly appear in the middle of the third trench. Its walls were flat as though they had been cut by a knife. A woman in a black veil jumped out of the trench and stood straight with her hands behind her back.

When he fired, he faintly heard a sharp sound of wind.

The moment he turned his head, the butt of a rifle hit him in the

face.

Nail suddenly felt everything go black and fell to the ground. Before losing consciousness, the last scene he saw was that his teammate raised a rifle toward him.

...

Roland stood on the command platform with a telescope, watching the defense line where the situation gradually became clear.

Some of the enemies had crossed the first three trenches and were making their way to the fourth. However, soldiers retreating from the front line made the subsequent defensive firepower more and more concentrated. Under the continuous fire of two machine guns that were occupying the high spot on the towers, the God's Punishment Army's offensive momentum obviously showed a decline.

By such a trend, they were not likely to make it to the remaining five trenches and artillery positions. The fire on the ground was too fierce and many church corps had been bogged down into a trench. The First Army would inevitably set up a blocking point at each exit of all longitudinal grooves, the advancing speed of the enemy would be drastically reduced and the speed advantage of the God's Punishment Army would no longer be obvious.

At this moment, the Judgement Army gradually stepped onto the battlefield. This army suffered heavy losses under the attack of the

Longsong Cannon, but had not yet been totally routed, which this was out of Roland's expectations. It was due to the pills of madness that made the soldiers berserk. But compared with that of the God's Punishment Army, their threat was clearly much lower. The pills of madness could not make people immune to fear. When the Judgement Army soldiers were subjected to the double attack of field artillery and machine guns, the will of Gods could not save them.

In fact, the greatest contributor to this battle was the bunkers on both sides and the eight Mark I type heavy machine guns in the tower. In order to ensure that they could fire continuously, not only did they need enough bullets but each team was equipped with nearly 10 barrels.

The only problem was that in order to employ this strategy, they had emptied their reserve of bullets. Of course, it was extremely economical to eliminate all the main forces of the church here.

During this time, Sylvie sometimes observed their magic reaction. But those pure witches had not played a significant role in the war. They followed the God's Punishment Army marching forward, but soon disappeared into smoke and artillery fire.

The outcome had been set!

Church of Hermes would soon become the dust of history.

Just as Roland thought that, suddenly there was an emergency!

"Pure witches ahead of us!" Sylvie, who also stood on the high platform, warned. "Four, no, five!"

The surface of the third trench suddenly rose, as if something was lifted up, and then it quickly fell down pulling the surrounding barbed wire and stakes together into the ground.

A woman in black veil appeared in the collapsed position. She did not take any action, she just looked straightforward.

A strange scene then occurred.

Numerous soldiers in the trenches turned their guns, aimed at their chin and then pulled the trigger.

A mass of mist burst from the trenches like a red fountain.

Four machine guns forts misfired at the same time.

Soldiers who were not affected shot her as if they just woke up.

Suddenly there were several shots in her body and she fell into the pit on her back.

Seizing this chance, the Judgement Army, under the effect of the pills of madness, rushed toward the defense line.



# Chapter 625: The Decisive Battle

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...

"Lady Zero, Margie appears to be worn out."

Vanilla turned around and said with an anxious look.

"Hold on."

Zero watched overhead with a grim expression. Although she was underground, she found a beam of light shone on the dome. The God's Punishment Army was moving forwards along the rampant trenches, encroaching on the enemy's position gradually. They, obviously, progressed slower and slower.

They could only choose to attack in a roundabout manner as each strategic pass was heavily-guarded. Therefore, they would be inevitably shot down by the snow powder weapons while throwing the spears. The gap between trenches could only be filled with the bodies of the soldiers, and the blue blood overflowed in the pit bottom.

It was even harder to march atop the ground.

Although the God's Punishment Warriors could leap over the wire entanglements which could not be destroyed, they would be likely exposed to the enemy's firepower. The flame was blazing all the way, in particular, in four towers in the rear of the defensive

lines, which blazed as if it would kill people at any time.

The third trench would probably be the ultimate limit that the God's Punishment Warriors could march to.

Dame it! She did not ever expect that things would actually come to such a deadlock.

She thought that she had prepared well for the arrival of this day,

Such as locating the accurate position of where Roland Wimbledon was.

The mission of the messengers was nothing more than a pretext to meet Roland, but it did not matter if they did not meet him. The letter written in the name of the pope revealed the secrets of the church and the Battle of Divine Will. People would not take it seriously when hearing such impossible information, but it would be much more convincing if the letter was written in the name of the pope.

Besides, what she wrote was true. Roland could still not make out her real intentions from the letter, even though he had witches skilled at handwriting recognition.

A special powder was daubed on the letter. It was an alchemic product developed by Pivotal Secret Authority that emitted a smell that ordinary people could not detect. Each time a person touched the letter, the smell would accumulate and be imbibed into the

skin, making it hard to remove, even with water.

Zero firmly believed that the letter would be delivered to Roland as no rulers would not be interested in these kinds of shocking secrets. Other people had no chances to read the letter and so in this case, Roland would have the strongest smell on his body. Although there were no differences between Roland and other people, Vanilla could easily sniff it out by virtue of the smell.

Vanilla could sniff out various unimaginable smells when she cast her ability. In her opinion, bloodstains after a month would still emit a faint stench and there would be a strange odor on furs when animals were in the rut.

At the moment, Roland was just a thousand steps away from them.

Zero even took all costs to use the God's Punishment Army and Judgement Army to divert the attention of the Graycastle's defensive line. Some Pure Witches of less importance even became the sacrificial lambs in consideration that there were witches who might perceive magic power in Roland's Camp. However, she, the evil backstage, was hiding underground and moving between the rocks by means of Margie's Magic Ark.

Blackveil was the real game-changer to win this war.

As one of three pure witches of the highest rank in Holy City, valued by His Holiness O'Brien, her ability was extremely terrible for common people who had no defensive abilities. The people that

had seen her would feel the inner feeling of dread when she was young. Her power was further strengthened when she was in adulthood. The strong sense of fear would occupy people's minds as long as they saw her eyes, and thus they would kill themselves or hurt people around due to their maniac surmises.

At the same time, the derivative ability was also powerful after Blackveil's awakening. The simple eye-to-eye contact could cause not only fear but also unclear illusions. Although her ability could only impact one person at a time, it would also play a vital role at a critical juncture. That was also why Archbishop Tayfun did not doubt the pope's orders.

At the gaze of the Eyes of Death, Zero took it for granted that Roland's troops would be defeated instantly.

Everything seemed to go smoothly, and Zero did not realize that she had the wrong idea until the war begun.

She did not expect that she had still underestimated the power of snow powder weapons.

Dense smoke and fire enveloped the mountain pass. With the help of snow powder weapons, Roland launched attacks from 5 kilometers away, and the troops of the church were heavily hit before touching the defensive lines.

She changed the battle tactics at once to attack the position but found that the God's Punishment Army was also in difficulty.

The seemingly shallow trenches were much harder to seize than the towering walls. The warriors wrested the transverse trenches from the flying bullets. However, they had never expected that the enemies did not care about the loss of the battle line and just retreated in order. They left the pass to the God's Punishment Army that had suffered a heavy cost and then continued to intercept them, relying on the following passes. During this period of time, Zero even saw an extraordinary witch.

Margie's Magic Ark could not be operated all the way to her target as her magic power had declined along with the combat capability of the God's Punishment Army. However, the current situation was still a far cry from her expectation.

Isabella perceived that less than half of enemies were wearing God's Stones. Under such circumstances, she had to gather them together if she wanted more people to see her. The God's Punishment Army was now marching forwards to the third entrenchment and the enemies were too sparse in the rest of entrenchments.

Once Blackveil was exposed to the enemies, she could only have a limited time to cast her power. How many enemies would notice her in an instant? She would be hit by the snow powder weapon before they came back to their minds.

"Your Holiness, the ark... will be torn apart soon..." Huge sweat had emerged from Margie's face, her voice slightly trembling. Obviously, the excessive use of her magic power was a heavy burden on her. At the same time, there were cracks in the walls and the dome became dim. Zero realized that she had to make a

choice.

Or rather, she had no other choice at all.

"Go up! Take action as scheduled!"

Margie took a breath and started to operate the ark to draw close to the ground. In a second the ark rushed out of the earth's surface, her magic power dissipated at once. A pungent smoke taste, boring and continuous roars along with a bloody smell, suddenly filled all around.

Blackveil turned around and glanced at Zero profoundly, and then leaped over the square-shaped pit left by the ark.

Foreseeably, it was the last time that she would serve the church.

The battlefield quietened down unexpectedly as if an invisible giant hand nipped people's throats.

"Isabella! Start using 'Infinite'!" Zero ordered.

After several ringing peals, a bunch of bloody flowers appeared on the back of Blackveil, and then she dropped down into the pit like a rootless fallen leaf.

Grinding her teeth, Isabella took the sigil in her hands.

The black and bright magic stone turned dark and gloomy at once as if it absorbed the sunshine around. Under the function of 'Infinite', an invisible ripple spread out and extended all over the battlefield. The amplitude of the fluctuation of the ripple was exactly the same as the God's Stone Roland wore but in an opposite direction. Under the influence of the ripple, the black hole formed by the God's Stone of premium quality vanished into the air.

Almost at the same time, Zero magically changed into a beam of light and flew towards the King of the Kingdom of Graycastle a thousand steps afar.

In a second flying out of the pit, she overlooked the whole battlefield from the sky.

There were hundreds of soldiers, who were also common people, lying down in the trenches,

Looks of shock and panic on their faces.

The Extraordinary was galloping fast.

While the Judgement Army was charging forward.

Everything seemed to come to a standstill until the lethal fire on the tower appeared again. And the whole battlefield returned to its normality. The yell of fighting, howls and explosive sounds mixed together, forming a thrilling ode.

She saw the prince with gray hair and felt the smiles from God upon her as she got closer and closer to the platform.

...

Nightingale witnessed the quirky change. In the misty world of white and black colors, the magic power of the beam of light was extremely expressive, like a mass of blurry cyclones coming towards the rear of their position at a tremendous speed.

She knew that it was the last and the most critical strike that the pure witch had launched.

"Protect His Majesty!"

Shavi stretched her hands to prop up a wide magic barrier, large enough to cover the whole platform.

Andrea summoned the Magical Longbow to shoot at the beam of light with arrows of light, bright as the sun.

In a bid to withdraw, Nightingale grabbed Roland who had lost the protection of the God's Stone as she had realized that the beam of light was targeted at His Majesty, Roland.

But it indeed moved too fast.

Instantly, the beam of light passed through the arrow of light and



the magic barrier and easily caught up with Nightingale and Roland, even the Mist could not block its tracking.

Nightingale pushed Roland away without any hesitations and turned around to crash straight into the beam of light.

However, all of her efforts did not work. It all happened in a split second. The beam of light pierced through her body and went into the body of Roland.

"No..." Nightingale cried out, heartbroken.

With his eyes widened, Roland's body shook hopelessly and fell backward feebly.

# Chapter 626: Battle of Fate (I)

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Was everything... a dream?

Roland blinked his eyes as he walked step-by-step to the fence in order to look down at the school's panorama against the sunset.

No one was in the spacious playground. Under the orange sunset, the goal looked lonely and its very long shadow was reflected on the ground. Far away were the familiar library and dormitory and the sunset painted the luminous windows with a ray of gold.

Roland had studied here for almost seven years so that he had been familiar with everything. He knew that he was standing on the rooftop of a teaching building and that this was his favorite place to spend his spare time.

Roland had many memories here.

Such as that iron gate behind him that was driven by the warm wind to open and close constantly.

This iron gate was billed as a unique view of the teaching building's rooftop, and its cover looked as ancient as a cultural relic excavated by archaeologists. When he had come to this school, the gate had already been torn and tattered. As long as it was pushed lightly, it would make noise continuously as if it were out of breath. Yet it was extremely quiet after it was opened and then closed. As far as Roland was concerned, the gate would fall apart soon, but still, at the time of his graduation, it stood still on the

rooftop.

"But since this was a dream, why did I look the same as Prince Roland?" thought Roland.

Roland lowered his head to see his slender hands, and then touched his gray hair on his shoulders. Apparently, the height and shape were different from what they were when he indulged himself in his studies.

"So... What had happened?" thought Roland.

Roland frowned, after a while he remembered that the last scene he had seen was that Nightingale had pushed him away, and then after a flash, he had only seen her panicking and despairing face.

"Who on earth... are you?"

A tactful and intangible female voice suddenly appeared beside him.

Roland was scared and abruptly turned around only to find that a lady with long white hair was walking toward him. She had a pair of ruby-like eyes and her red and white robe dropped down to the ground with a golden pattern embroidered on its bottom, which obviously did not belong to this era. Besides, the golden throne of her head showed her identity.

"You're a pure witch of the church?"

"Yes. But I'm also the 15th Pope of Holy City of Hermes." She paused and continued to say, "I'm Zero, while you're definitely not Roland Wimbledon."

Well, Roland frowned and said, "So did you create this place?"

Everything made sense. The flash should be Zero's ability that Nightingale had wanted to help him to escape from. And the scenery before him should be an illusion or a virtual space, something like that. The moment he opened his eyes, Roland thought that he had come back to the modern world again.

Even though Roland knew that perhaps the church was originally the Union, it never occurred to him that the pope was a pure witch. Therefore, it was so incredible to see that these witches boldly turned other witches into inhumane monsters.

"No, you created this place." Zero walked toward him step-by-step and said in an exciting tone, "The place is hidden deeply in your memories and appears frequently in most of your daily life. But I'm curious as to where this is. We both know that Prince Roland of the Graycastle would have never lived in such a place."

"Why should I tell you?" Roland moved to the other side of the fence and kept a distance from her.

What could he do to shake off the illusion? Roland thought of many ideas in his mind. Maybe he could jump off here? Based on his experiences of nightmares, he would instantly wake up from a

nightmare if he jumped off of a high place.

Zero smiled and said in a sweet tone, "It's okay that you won't tell me. I'll spend a little of time finally figuring out that who you're, where you're from and why you've become Prince Roland."

Would she finally find out? "You mean to tell me that you'll read my memories?" Roland asked in a very cold tone, "Don't flatter yourself."

Zero suddenly stopped and said, "You know what? I would explain to each one trapped in the illusion the effects, rules, and the impact of my ability. Everyone except for you."

"What?"

The moment Roland asked, he found that Zero had appeared in front of him. And a sudden pain made him lose his hearing.

Roland trembled and lowered his head to only find that a knife was inserted into his chest. Roland wanted to shout, but he could not make any sound. His chest was destroyed completely and the opening and closing of his thoracic cavity could not squeeze even a little air into his throat.

Just like an electrical current, the strong pain spread over his body. Roland would rather die immediately than suffer one more second.

"Because I don't like anything that's confusing."

At the other end of the knife was Zero's calm face. Half of her body was splashed and wet by Roland's gushing blood. Due to hypoxia and the self-protective syncope of his brain, he quickly became unconscious.

But the next second, Roland stood still beside the fence, his body intact. In addition, Zero also stood far away from him, like she had never left that spot.

"What had happened?" Roland took deep breathes. "Was it just an illusion?" He covered his chest that was moving up and down fiercely, and the wound still hurt. Looking down, he saw the shape of a pool of blood.

"Damn, what had happened just now was true," thought Roland.

Staring at the knife held by Zero, Roland was quite surprised in his heart because there had been nothing in her hand before.

"Could she create something out of nothing?"

Just at the moment, Zero rushed toward him again. She was so quick that Roland could not see her clearly.

Roland instantly turned around to escape, but just after a step, he felt a pain in his abdomen.

Then, Roland experienced death again. Zero wielded her long knife to cut him into two halves. The pain this time lasted longer than last time and he fell down into his own blood and outflowing guts. The lasting pain made him shout so miserably that even he was frightened by his own voice.

After his second resurrection, Roland had realized something.

This is a nightmare that can't be broken by jumping off of a high place or from feeling fierce pain. It's like a cyclical arena.

Damn it. What're conditions of escaping from this? What about defeating the white-haired witch in front me?

"Zero can create weapons out of nothing, but what about me?" Roland gritted his teeth and started to concentrate his spirit. "If I had had a shield, I would be able to fight against her."

A blue light flashed.

A transparent anti-explosive shield appeared in Roland's hand. He had stopped her attack, but there was a deep scar left on the shield. What was worse, Roland was blown away by the huge clash.

"Well, this was what had happened," Roland said a dirty word in his heart.

When rolling over, Roland dropped the shield and manifested an automatic rifle.

When Roland raised the rifle to shoot, Zero disappeared.

"What was going on?" thought Roland.

"I'm right here."

Her voice emerged next to his ears.

After a white light flashed, his arms dropped to the ground, so did the rifle.



# Chapter 627: The Intertwined Battle of Fate (II)

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"I must admit that I'm surprised by your ability to comprehend," Zero walked to him and said while squatting down, "You're the first one who can comprehend this and counterattack without being given any explanation."

The Pure Witch picked up the rifle on the ground, carefully explored it for a moment and said, "Rare materials, exquisite processing techniques... Is this a snow powder weapon as well? The items you created are really scary, however, they do not pose much threat to me. I've been watching the entire battle closely. Most of the slender tubes in the tunnel and the thick iron tubes behind the camp rely on the operators and you could not even see my movements." She shook her head and said, "It's impossible for you to defeat me, I've devoured over a thousand warriors and even an Extraordinary over the years."

Suddenly, a green plastic box appeared between them.

A loud explosion suddenly rang through the roof. The glass in the classroom crunched and even the entire floor of the building was blown up with a hole in it. The air current swept the old iron stairwell door to the ground.

"It's not because I have a strong ability to comprehend, but your stage setting is too lousy!" Roland reappeared in the corner of the rooftop. He was gasping for air as the sharp pain was still fresh in his memory. He could now understand the feeling of those who were amputated before they died. He 'made' an explosive to bomb

both Zero and himself into pieces at the same time as he could not tolerate it anymore.

"Lousy?" Zero who was newly born raised her eyebrows and said, "It's in your memory."

"However, it's created through your ability. It's six o'clock in the evening, the busiest time on the campus! How is it possible that there's no one on the field? It seems exquisite but it's just a setting full of loopholes." He was thinking of a countermeasure while delaying for time. "Is this the way you devour your opponent? Force them into despair so that they'll give up and obediently dedicate their knowledge and skills to you?"

The skills of the Pure Witch were somewhat similar to the Extraordinary, or at least Roland had only seen such power and speed on Ashes. The Pure Witch could only be hurt by powerful explosives from which he could not escape either as it was difficult to hit her with only a normal firearm.

However, was it really that simple? After three resurrections, Roland could already feel his sweaty back. His heart was pounding faster than before as if he just ran around the field and he was physically weaker.

Perhaps the number of the resurrections was limited.

In this case, it was not a good idea to bomb an entire building with high explosives... The score was already three to one now and he must quickly regain the position.

There was no doubt that what he needed was a weapon that could both attack and defend.

"Although I don't quite understand what you're talking about, however, isn't it good to surrender?" Zero said with her head tilted to one side, "It's a wise choice even if it means that you have to give up as death is a torture to anyone."

"You can keep those words to yourself." Roland loudly shouted. "Ironman!"

A red metal armor suddenly appeared in front of him and he quietly recited "Start the program" in his heart after walking into the armor from behind.

A narrow display screen appeared at the front of the helmet, however, the armor did not close up by itself and no artificial intelligence responded to his command.

The armor fell to the ground straight away, even before he managed to move forward.

Zero's blade had already cut into Roland's neck when he got up.

The entire world suddenly turned upside down and he could see his body helplessly kneeling down before he passed out.

"You should at least give it some joints if you're trying to create a plate armor," the Pure Witch knocked on the empty armor and said, "However, I don't think that a hollow and thin iron sheet has much effect."

Roland's heart quickly sank after his fourth resurrection.

Although the death was not painful, Roland had realized a harsh truth, the thing he created without understanding its principle was just an empty shell. For example, the display screen on the helmet was simply a camera.

"Damn, I can only use the stupid method now."

While Zero was still pondering on the metal armor, a few pieces of steel plates as thick as 10 centimeters appeared out of nowhere and fell beside him, forming into a blockhouse that could hide only one person. A protected weapon control station rose on the top of the blockhouse and it was carrying 40 millimeters grenade machine gun. Roland quickly plunged into it and locked the entrance while controlling the weapon station to fire at the Pure Witch.

This attempt had finally worked.

Zero could not avoid the destruction scope of the grenade machine gun even when she approached the blockhouse again. Roland continuously shot the grenades around the blockhouse and the flying fragments had pierced through her body while making a banging noise as they hit the thick steel plate.

Unfortunately, Roland was unable to find Zero's resurrection position at once and she had quickly retracted to hide in the corner of the stairwell to avoid the explosive grenade that was coming towards her.

A radiant splendor appeared in the darkening sky when he was just about to 'create' another weapon. A golden light was swirling above the clouds and the dazzling tassels had replaced the sunset which was cast into the shade.

The scene was familiar to him.

Suddenly, a myriad of golden thunder fell on top of the building and Roland was instantly engulfed!

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After the fifth death, Roland was drenched in cold sweat as if he just came out of the water and his calves and arms were uncontrollably twitching.

The blockhouse was completely melted by the Sigil of God's Will. However, it had not caused much damage to the ground other than the ground was charred. The unreasonable magic power was still working in this battle.

"Just give up." Unexpectedly, Zero did not closely pursue. "Your energy has already reached the limit. Any additional battle is

meaningless as you'll not get anything other than endless pain."

Roland clenched his teeth and strongly held on to himself. "Why does she keep asking me to surrender when she can obviously win this battle if she continues to pursue and attack? Is the output going to be different for her if I surrender myself instead of being killed after exhaustion?"

"You should now understand that both creation and death consume energy. The exhaustion of energy means failure. Everyone has a different energy level and it's beyond my expectation that you can last until now." She stretched out her arms and said, "By the way, I have an over 200 years of experience. That will be doubled if it includes the time I spent in the soul battle. In other words, my energy is enough to endure hundreds of deaths and your efforts will only make you more desperate."

"Hundreds... Is it a boast or the truth?" However, Roland felt that Zero was not lying as she looked relaxed.

And, Roland did not have much energy left to consume.

# Chapter 628: The Intertwined Battle of Fate (III)

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Roland's experience from dying five times led him to realize that the biggest difference between the two lies in them themselves. The powerful weapons could easily affect himself and the fixed bunker would become the target of the Sigil of God's Will. Not to mention, in all likelihood, Zero knew the recipe for snow powder, if she became desperate to perish with him or the roof directly collapsed, he was not confident of the outcome as he did not have many lives to consume.

He would lose this battle for sure if he could not control the Pure Witch.

"What should I do now?" thought Roland.

"A cage? An oriented mine? A power grid? A laser fence?" Roland had rejected all the answers that were constantly appearing in his mind as none of them could really confine Zero. The position after death could not be defined as it could be at the original spot or any corner of the roof. His energy had obviously hit bottom and constantly creating consumables was just wasting his remaining resurrections. The next failure might be his real death.

"I have to deprive her of her mobility."

"And, I have to also keep the roof intact."

"I have to also kill her hundreds of time in a shot..."

"Is it... Is it possible?"

Roland took a deep breath and asked, "During these 200 years, how many times have you fought such a battle?"

"Over 1000 times or more, however, only a few that really impressed me," Zero answered, "They had a stronger will than you do, however, they were still defeated by the endless deaths. There are only a few people who'll choose to continue being tortured while facing a hopeless ending." She paused and said, "Are you still going to stick to your previous approach?"

"I indeed don't have much hope, however, I simply want to fulfill my curiosity before everything comes to an end. You've never failed in over 1000 battles?"

"I would not be standing here if I failed."

"How come?" Roland slowly sat down to save the little energy he had left. "Did no one think of creating lava or a deep sea to defeat you before you attained such great power?"

"This isn't a new idea, but unfortunately, no one can do it." Zero walked in front of him. "Just changing the place that we're standing in consumes no lesser energy than death. Changing the world is just a delusion and only God can do it."



"There's no God in my world," he said lamentably.

"So, have you decided to give up?" The Pure Witch Zero bent down to lift up his chin and she said, "In this case, submit to me and follow me."

"Sorry." Roland smiled while holding on to both her shoulders and gently pushed her away. "I still want to try again."

Zero arose and pulled out her weapon, however, she found that the distance between both of them was constantly growing larger.

Her expression quickly changed as she realized that she was unable to move any closer to Roland. Her body was still sliding backward even when she was running at full speed! Zero looked down and noticed that the floor beneath her feet had become as smooth as a mirror without her knowing.

However, she would not slip even if the ground was so smooth which was contrary to her common sense. Her body remained relatively still as if it was nailed to the ground regardless of what she was doing.

"Your amazing mobility doesn't seem to work anymore," Roland said, "Even a monster like you can't move a step closer without the support of friction."

"What did you do?" Zero bent down and tried to slow down or change the direction using both her arms and her legs. However, it

was futile.

"I simply made a small change to the battlefield." He changed into a more comfortable sitting position and said, "It seems that the energy consumed for changing the environment won't be too far off as long as the changes aren't too big. Have you ever heard of the law of inertia?"

"Inertia...?"

"When an object is not subject to external forces, it will either stay still or be in constant linear motion. Of course, you can also call it Newton's First Law." The ground dramatically changed as soon as Roland hit the railing of the roof and stopped!

The steel frame grew out of the ground and continuously extended into the sky followed by the metal sheet cover which was wrapping up the black frames. Soon, a monument with glowing cold light appeared behind Roland. Each layer of the monument was evenly divided into around 10 rectangular units which looked like an elongated Rubik's cube. There was a black hollow steel tube coming out from the center of each of the rectangular units which were pointing towards Zero who was still sliding at a constant speed.

"It's my turn now."

Zero noticed something was wrong. She held up her longsword and the golden light appeared again.

However, this time Roland was faster than her.

The nearly 100 steel tubes roared at the same time. The burning gunpowder instantly heated up the air to over 1,000 degrees and the rapid expansion of the air generated by the high pressure pushed the shells out of the tube towards the Pure Witch, Zero with a speed of 1,900 meters per second. The loud roar was deafening and the campus which had just fallen into the night was instantly lit up as if the sun just rose from the roof.

There were a hundred billion turrets and trillions of starlights!

The night sky was lit up by the fireflies which just flew in. The densely-gathered light spots drew a dazzling track in the night sky and poured onto the ground in a crisscrossing motion one by one. The fireflies were making a shrilling noise while struggling to flap their wings as if they were announcing their arrival to the world.

Then, they crashed to the ground.

The light of the fireflies was magnified by tens of thousands of times at that moment, their bodies turned into broiling broken pieces which splattered all around... A roaring explosion noise was followed by the dazzling light which was combined with the echoes of a whistling sound in the sky. However, Roland was no longer able to hear the sonata formed by the intertwined metal and gunpowder as his eardrums were already broken by the high-pitched sound of the first flame that was emitted by the black monument. The gigantic barrel was roaring below him and the boiling hot air had hurt his cheek. However, he was very happy.

The world had become quite different as he was standing on top of the square monument.

The entire roof was divided into equal parts, like a chessboard. Each block was pouring with cannon. He could see that Zero was being thrown up and down by the explosive air currents, like the falling leaves in a storm. Nothing could live under the coverage of gunfire. The deadly fireflies would follow and devour her again once she was reborn. She was unable to avoid this as she could not even change her direction on the non-friction ground but helplessly she watched the numerous light spots with a long flame tail landed in front of her with a whistle.

"It's impossible!"

Zero shouted incredulously. "You can't create things that don't exist out of nowhere, this... doesn't exist!"

The ground was still as clean as new without a trace of scratch after the wash of gunfire as if it had nothing to do with the flying fireflies in the sky. "It's smoother than a mirror and stronger than steel. It's impossible for such thing to exist!" The Pure Witch Zero hysterically screamed.

Although Roland could not hear her, he could guess what she felt. He could not turn himself into Superman, but he could create a power that was no less than a superman.

He changed the distance between atoms within the ground

surface.

Atoms were closely attached to each other with a strong interaction, like the soldiers who neatly lined up. This surface was almost absolutely smooth and incredibly strong. The tetrahedron carbide was as soft as water in front of it.

Zero was completely confined as she could not run or hide and was surging up and down with the gunfire. It was nothing to do with will but the great disparity of knowledge.

She had tried to activate the Sigil of God's Will several times. However, the continuous gunfire would not give her any respite and she gradually lost the sustainability of her appearance.

"Please, let me go!" Her voice was ringing in Roland's heart.

"Are you going to kill your sister?" It became Garcia's plea after a moment.

"Stop, you're such a monster. You're killing your family member!" Followed by the reproach of King Wimbledon III.

However, Roland remained unmoved.

"It's time to end it all," he answered in his heart, "I'll defeat the demons on behalf of you. Rest in peace!"

"No, I won't let you go!"

A dazzling blue light lit up the entire night sky along with Zero's scream.

After that, the entire world fell apart.

# Chapter 629: After the Decisive Battle

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There was clamor outside of the tent. Nail, who lay on the ground in a daze, turned his head to see that the thick curtain had been lifted by a corner and that His Excellency Iron Axe was bending down into the tent.

"Co-commander." He had never expected that the commander of the First Army would come to visit him. He quickly sat up straight and saluted.

"No need for etiquette." Iron Axe walked to his bedside and sat down, crossing his legs. "How's your injury?"

"It doesn't matter. Only two teeth were broken." Nail touched his swollen cheek. "I'm not that hurt."

"All right." Iron Axe then added, "Miss Nana has been so busy these days that, and since your wound wasn't too severe, you'll be recovering on your own. When the rescue is over, you can inquire and see Baron Pine to repair your teeth, and the First Army will pay for it."

"I can fully understand, and there's no need to bother her with such a little injury. After all, Miss Nana is very tired..." Nail hesitated for a moment before continuing. "How about Hound? He..."

Hound was the one who had grabbed a teammate's spear and hit Nail to the ground, stunning him with the butt. Nail could still

remember the moment that the other side had aimed a gun at Hound.

"Don't worry. He's alright," Iron Axe said to comfort him, "He was pulled down by the guards the moment the other side raised their gun. He attacked you because of the pure witch's magic. So he won't be punished and has returned to the team to train."

"Really?..." Nail was a bit relieved. "I thought I was dead at that moment. What about the other teams?"

According to the arrangement before the war, each bunker had been arranged with two machine gun teams and a five-man guarding platoon. So, even if the enemies approached a bunker, they had the ability to defend on site. In addition to the two or three soldiers in charge of carrying ammunition on the team, all the others wore God's Stones of Retaliation. The seemingly perfect action appeared flawless.

"These accidents happen," Iron Axe said with his hands outstretched, "but, it didn't cause much harm, or we wouldn't be standing here."

"Was the church forced back...?" The minute he asked, Nail realized that it was an idiot's question. "Um, I want to know what happened after."

"The enemies launched their final charge but failed to cross the fourth trench. Both the God's Punishment Army and the Judgement Army were completely defeated, leaving more than



two thousand bodies at the front of their position. They fled in haste... We won the battle."

What confused Nail was that Iron Axe was not very excited, and instead, he said all this in a neutral tone. Iron Axe did not offer the reason, and Nail was not bold enough to ask.

Then there was a long silence.

After a long while, Iron Axe sighed and clapped him on the shoulder. "Since you're alright, have a good rest, and I'll go visit the other wounded guys."

Seeing that Iron Axe was about to leave, Nail gathered his courage and stopped him. "Your Excellency..."

"What's up?"

"I, I want to leave the First Army." He whispered.

Iron Axe frowned. "Why?"

"Maybe, I can't be a machine gunner anymore." Nail lowered his head in shame. Every time he closed his eyes, he would see the scene where that young woman in the red cape was sprayed by a machine gun. "I wasn't able to immediately shoot at the enemy..."

"Your target was an underaged pure witch, right?" Iron Axe

interrupted him. "Your team already reported that to me in their postwar summary. I don't think that your idea is correct, but it can't be wrong. So, I'll just ask you one thing, are you going to betray His Majesty?"

"No! Your Excellency, of course not." Nail quickly denied. "My life belongs to His Majesty."

"So, I'm not going to approve your request," Iron Axe said without hesitation, "This is currently the most critical moment for the First Army and even City of Neverwinter. I demand that everyone in the army abide by his duty and guard His Majesty Roland Wimbledon at all cost. And, we have to spare no effort to do it! You can't be a gunner. Well, you can be an observer or a protector, but you're absolutely not allowed to leave the army, understand?"

That last sentence from the commander was in an authoritative tone.

"Ye-yes! Your Excellency!" Nail said, punctuating with a military salute.

"That's all." After Iron Axe left, without looking back, Nail felt deeply startled.

"Were we not victorious? Why is the most critical moment now? And, why did His Excellency Iron Axe so solemnly command the First Army to protect His Majesty Roland at all cost..." A terrible thought suddenly occurred to him. "Did his? Did his majesty have

an accident during the battle?"

As soon as he thought this, he shuddered.

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"How's it going?" Calvin Kant walked into his daughter's bedroom to see that she was picking up clothes.

"The First Army and the witches have surrounded the castle tightly, and even I can't get in." Edith curled her lip. "But, if he gets better, the news will leak, so... I guess, he was the same as before."

"What about you? Are you ready for a long journey?" Duke Calvin Kant picked up a black veil evening dress from a mountain of dresses on the bed and looked at it carefully. "Is this one too revealing?"

Edith rolled her eyes. "I didn't say that I was going to pick it, and wasn't that a gift from you? At the time, you intended to let me wear it to attend Timothy's dinner party."

"Ahem... really." Calvin put down the gown sheepishly. "Do you think that His Majesty's troops will withdraw to City of Neverwinter?"

"Probably." Edith stuffed several coats into the open suitcase. "Although the church has been totally defeated, much of the First Army's supply was consumed. Adviser's Department will take

about a month to regain operational ability. If His Majesty Roland is fine, there's no reason for him not to stay in the Northern Region for a while. But, if he's unconscious, no one can guarantee the overall morale. Under this condition, Iron Axe absolutely wouldn't dare to continue attacking Holy City, so what he'll do shouldn't be difficult to guess. "

"Are you determined to follow them back?" Calvin asked with concern, "If something terrible happens... to His Majesty, the kingdom may fall into civil strife, so it'll be safer for you to stay in the Northern Region."

"That's why I'm going to City of Neverwinter." Edith stood up and slipped her long hair over her shoulder and onto her back. "It has become the new starting point for the kingdom there—whether Roland is there or not makes no difference. And, his coma presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the Kant family."

Duke Calvin Kant could not help inhaling a cold breath. "Are you going to..."

"Your thoughts are too simple." Edith shrugged. "The only one who can replace Roland is his sister Tilly Wimbledon, and I'm afraid that no one can connect the ordinary people with the witches except her. But, there's the problem that she's also a witch herself, so when dealing with the affairs of nobles, she needs greater help from the ordinary people." She paused. "That person will undoubtedly be me. Dad, this is the best shortcut to climb that pinnacle of power and I don't want to miss it."

# Chapter 630: The Captive Pure Witch

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Never before in her life had Nightingale felt so remorseful and regretful.

She thought that as long as she stayed with Roland, no one could hurt him.

However, without any bruises on her body, Nightingale stood in the bedroom of the castle in Deepvalley Town while Roland lay unconscious on the bed.

There was not any magic reaction inside Roland's body and his internal organs were all intact. Therefore, Roland was neither cursed by a Seed of Peaceful Death or something like that nor hurt by a powerful ability capable of destroying organs. Even though Agatha was knowledgeable, she could not distinguish this ability, let alone its breaking method.

The witches had used all of the regular wake-up means they could think of, but they were all useless. Roland did not respond to any outside stimulus. If he was not breathing, Roland would have been considered dead.

Now, Nightingale finally understood the warning from Agatha.

There was no absolutely safe defense, even in front of the witches' abilities.

But her understanding was too late.

At this moment, hurried footsteps came from behind the door. Then Lightning opened the door and shouted. "The pure witch has woken up!"

The witches in the room all instantly got excited.

"Everyone stay calm. It's useless for us all to go and investigate her," Wendy said, "besides, we're not clear about her ability. For the sake of safety, Miss Agatha and Nightingale can go and figure this out for us."

Respected deeply by the other witches, they all quietened at Wendy's calm tone.

Nightingale took a deep breath and nodded to Wendy. "I'll handle it."

Based on her experience from being a runaway for several years, Nightingale was fully aware that her negative mood would not help to change the existing situation. She could not shirk her responsibilities because of a mistake she had made, no matter how big and especially at such a critical juncture.

She must bring His Majesty, Roland back.

"Let's go," Agatha sighed and said.

When leaving the room, Nightingale could not help but look back to see that Anna was sat motionless on the bed with her eyes staring at Roland, as if no other things could draw her attention.

Nightingale felt even guiltier in her heart.

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A servant room on the first floor of the castle that had been altered into a special detention room. Dozens of God's Stone of Retaliation were embedded behind the four walls forming a black hole, and thus, an anti-ability prison had been readied. Only by standing in the center of the room could a witch cast her ability.

Nightingale was very clear about the target she was about to investigate.

After the battle, the First Army found three pure witches that were still alive in a square-shaped pit within the third trench. One was detached, one was in a coma and the last one was conscious but trembling. According to the last one, there were five pure witches hidden underground, Zero, Isabella, Blackveil, Margie and herself, Vanilla.

According to Vanilla's intelligence, she and Margie were only responsible for identifying the location of His Majesty, Roland and sneakily escorting the other three to the battle. Thus they knew little about other arrangements. As for Zero, Isabella and Blackveil, they all were directly affiliated with the pope and had

the same status as an archbishop. Besides, their abilities were hidden by the Holy Church so that few knew the details. Blackveil was already dead and Zero had disappeared, so they could only get the breaking method from Isabelle.

After an examination, they had found out that the reason that Isabella was in a coma was that she had used all of her magic power. Therefore, Isabella would fully recover in one or two days. In addition, Agatha got a strange sigil on her hand, but she could not identify it because the magic stone was completely ruined.

Unexpectedly, Isabella had been in a coma for five days and so Nightingale had been quite anxious, even wanting to forcibly wake her up with a knife. Lest for Wendy, she would have done so.

"Was she woken up?" Agatha asked Lightning.

Lightning shook her head and said, "She woke up by herself. When it was Ashes' turn to examine her, Isabella sat on the head of the bed and told us that the prison was useless for her."

Nightingale's face became dark, asking, "Is she challenging us now?"

"We'll find out," Agatha said calmly.

Having passed through the layers of the strict guards of the First Army, Nightingale and Agatha walked into a narrow room where there were no windows. A rosined torch was hung high above their



heads which gave off a dim light. There was nothing in this room other than a vertical wooden bed and a short table.

Isabella sat motionlessly on the head of the bed. Her curled hair dropped naturally on her shoulders and became golden-red under the firelight. She was still dressed in that bloody robe of priests with dust on her face that had solidified into yellow spots.

"It seems that Zero has completely failed," before Nightingale asked her, Isabella took the initiative to say, "Finally, she isn't blessed by God."

"Blessed by God?" Nightingale smiled coldly.

"Don't worry and I'll tell you everything I know," as if she did not hear the sarcasm, Isabella sighed and said, "then, I'll be at your disposal."

Nightingale was stunned by Isabella's attitude because she knew that Isabella was telling the truth.

But it was a little too late to be a lamb. "You've claimed that this prison can't hold you, haven't you? But now you choose to submit to fate?"

"I'm capable of making the God's Stone of Retaliation lose effect. As long as I have a platform, God's Stone would be useless, even if there are as many stones as you have here," Isabella said slowly, "Except for that, I can neither walk through a wall nor escape away

underground, so it's a waste to arrange such a room for me."

"You're capable of influencing the God's Stone?" Agatha was very surprised and asked.

Isabella said frankly, "They indeed look like bottomless black holes... but I can make them lose effect."

"You mean that it was you who made the God's Stone worn by His Majesty, Roland lose effect?" Nightingale clenched her hands into fists.

"I had no other choice at that moment. Zero had become blinded by God. She believed that only one of the two can be blessed by God."

Agatha covered Nightingale's hand and calmly asked, "Is it Zero who made His Majesty unconscious? What's her ability?"

Isabella frowned and said, "Unconscious? There should be a winner and loser instantly when a Soul Battlefield begins. If Roland didn't become Zero instantly, it means that Zero failed. Is he unconscious because he can't accept the huge volume of memories?"

Nightingale and Agatha looked at each other. "Soul Battlefield?"

"Yes," Isabella said with her voice down, "that's a battle about spirit and will. The winner gets everything, while the loser loses

everything. Since Zero was awakened to be a witch, she's never failed in the Battle of Souls. She's engulfed numberless commoners and witches and absorbed their memories, knowledge and longevity. So for the time being, Zero has lived for over 200 years." Speaking of which, Isabella closed her eyes sadly, saying, "I never thought that she would be defeated by a common prince."

# Chapter 631: Promises Then and Now

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After hearing the description of the Soul Battlefield from Isabella, Nightingale began getting depressed. "Do you mean that you also don't know how to make His Majesty wake up from the coma?"

She shook her head. "This is unprecedented, and I have no idea how to deal with it... But Zero was absentminded for a while when she was devouring Garcia. At that time, she explained that she had found some interesting things in Garcia's memory and so it took her a long time. Zero has had a more complicated life than anyone else, so if Roland wants to accept these parts of Zero's memories, it may take some more time. But as long as he's alive, he'll wake up naturally."

Nightingale could not be sure whether this was true or not, but she could tell that Isabella did not lie. At least these conjectures were heartfelt thoughts from Isabella.

But Nightingale also knew that the situation was not at all optimistic.

Would the 200 years of memories from the church or His Majesty's memories dominate Roland? Or would Roland get lost in these complicated memories and never wake up?

Even if Roland accepted all of Zero's memories, would he be that Roland Wimbledon, the fourth Prince of Graycastle that he used to be when he woke up... The one I look forward to seeing?

The many thoughts made were almost impossible for Nightingale to control her mind.

Then Nightingale also understood why Wendy had asked Agatha to come with her.

"Let's talk about the church," Agatha said after hesitating for a while, "How much do you know about the Union, the predecessor of the church?"

"I know almost all that Zero has learned." Isabella responded frankly. "Are you still doubtful about the words in the letter? Since Zero took over the pope's role, all of the pure witches that have been approved for the Pivotal Secret Authority can enter the library and read the history of 400 years ago. The records about the Witch Empire and the demons in the letter are true."

"The limited information in the letter isn't valuable to us." Agatha smiled. "The Witch Empire is just history for you, but for me, it's part of my life. I'm a witch in the Union."

Isabella was surprised at this turn and asked, "What, what did you say?"

"I came from Holy City of Taquila more than 400 years ago and witnessed the destruction of it. The demons aren't rare and still occupy most of the lands of Dawn Ridge. There are demon battalions at the end of Misty Forest and Redwater River to the west of the Kingdom of Graycastle. Roland has encountered them

before."

Isabella was stunned in place, speechlessly.

"We'll fight with the demons eventually. We all know that the Battle of Divine Will is coming soon. Roland chose to fight this battle now in order to relieve the oppression of the church." Agatha paused and continued to say, "What I want to know is, how did the Union transform into the church?"

"This is..." It was a long time before Isabella became calm again. "As mentioned in the history book, during the escape, a civil war broke out in the Union in the northwest of the Impassable Mountain Range. There were no detailed reasons. We just know that the Union was separated into two groups since that time. One group, the Taquila witches, got into the maze remains of the mountains. The other group, led by the witches of Starfall City, inherited Lady Alice's will to move northward and settled down on Hermes Plateau, which finally became the church."

"A civil war during the escape?" Agatha frowned and said, "This is undoubtedly suicide."

"The writer of that history book also thought so. The Union suffered heavy losses in the civil war. Two Transcendents were lost and totally separated from the migration team of the common people. When the group going north arrived at their destination, most of those common people fled." Isabella sighed. "As for the war of faith later, it was to kill those non-combat witches who didn't belong to Starfall City. Only in this way could the church completely bury the history of the past."

"Is burying the past a reason to hunt witches wantonly? Even to go so far as to create the unconscious God's Punishment Army?" Nightingale said in a cold tone, "You are all crazy."

"Without this civil war, the four kingdoms would have been controlled by the Union from the beginning. The size of the God's Punishment Army would have been far larger," Isabella said peacefully, "Of course, since Roland Wimbledon now has a better way, Holy City of Hermes isn't necessary any longer."

"You have no nostalgia for the church!" said the Nightingale sarcastically.

"As long as the demons can be defeated, I don't care who'll take charge of the continent. That was also the Union's original intention," Isabella closed her eyes and said, "Although Zero was crazy, she had greater faith in fighting against the demons than most people, and that's why I chose to help her."

Hearing this, Nightingale could not help pulling out a dagger.

"If killing her can wake Roland up, I won't stop you." Agatha whispered.

After a long while, Nightingale indignantly put the dagger back into the sheath.

"By the way, one more thing," as soon as the two were ready to

leave, Isabella suddenly spoke, "although Zero allowed pure witches to enter the Temple to read the books in the library, she prohibited anyone from visiting the prayer room. Even moving close to it. She told me that it was only by standing there that she could meet God directly."

...

Nightingale smashed the wall vigorously when going out of the captivity room and said, "Damn it! We still can't find a way to awaken His Majesty!"

"We've done what we can, all we can do is to continue to wait," Agatha said with comfort, "anyway, let's report what we've got to everyone first."

"I promise that she'll pay the price!"

"As long as she's alive, she's important for us to tackle Holy City and explore the secrets of the God stone."

Soon, the witches gathered outside the bedroom and began to listen to the intelligence about the pure witches from Agatha. But Nightingale's mind had already drifted away.

She quietly stepped back to the corner, cast the ability of the Mist, and went into Roland's bedroom.

Except for her, there was only Anna left in the quiet room.



Nightingale slowly walked to the bed and saw Anna holding Roland's right hand, whispering something.

Only by holding her breath could Nightingale hear the whispers of Anna.

"Do you remember what I said to you?"

"If you're dead, I'll go to Sleeping Island with those who're willing to follow you and fight against the church to the end."

"But you're still alive."

"You're just sleeping."

"So I'll wait forever."

"As long as you still can breathe, I'll always be there for you. For one day, one year or even my whole life."

"You can sleep soundly."

"I'll take care of you."

Nightingale felt her heart fiercely tightening up. The feeling of heartbroken was even more unbearable than that of being badly

hurt. Somehow, she bent over uncontrollably and covered her chest tightly.

A warm river blurred her eyes.

# Chapter 632: Out of Deep Sleep

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When the light pierced through the darkness and his blur vision adjusted to the light source, the white ceiling was the first thing that Roland saw. It took him several seconds to get rid of his dizziness and he felt increasingly weird as his vision became clearer.

"Where exactly is this?" thought Roland.

He suddenly sat up and noticed that he was actually sleeping in a modern-looking bedroom. He was sleeping in a soft bed with a table lamp and a box of napkins on one side and a maroon-colored wardrobe on the other side. The dazzling sun shone through the blinds and evenly poured on the mat and his arms, making him feel slightly warm.

"Damn! Is this fight not over yet?" Roland's sleepiness completely disappeared in a sudden.

He rolled off the bed and stretched out his hand to summon a gun for self-defense but his hand was still empty after several attempts.

His heart sank.

"Can it be... the rules of the battlefield have changed again?"

"It's too bad. If I have to be unarmed, I would only be beaten up by the pure witch with her skills and speed."

"And, what about the deal of choosing my most impressive scene as the battle ring? I did not have any impression of this d\*mn room!"

Roland quietly walked to the bedroom door and leaned against the door to listen for a moment. He heard an intermittent voice, which seemed that someone was talking outside.

He carefully held onto the door handle and slit the door. It was a more spacious room which was furnished as a living room. The old fan beside the empty couch was rattling and continuously buzzing. There were a tea table and a wall-hanging television with a constantly flashing screen in front of the couch. It was probably where the voice came from.

Except that, no one was in the living room.

Such situation was a little weird.

Roland took a deep breath and slowly walked into the living room.

The red ribbon on the fan cover was dancing along the wind and the gently blowing cool wind refreshed him. He realized that the room was a little stuffy at the moment, and the echoing chirr of the cicadas signified that it was the summer season.

A few magazines were scattered on the couch. Roland picked up

one of them and flipped through it. The content was actually extremely childish. They were fashion news, horoscopes, and divination that were only read by immature little girls.

He frowned even more deeply.

This was apparently not his house as he would not buy such magazines at all, be it in the past life or the present life.

The news on the television at this moment attracted Roland's attention.

"Yesterday evening, an unexplainable explosion happened at a local university. A school building was damaged. The pictures of the scene showed that the entire rooftop had collapsed and there were scattered broken glasses everywhere. What actually happened? Now, let's contact the reporter at the scene."

He dropped his jaw as he could hardly believe what he just saw.

"Good afternoon, everyone. I'm standing beside the school building where the explosion occurred." A female reporter appeared on the screen and the background was the building where he battled with Zero! "According to the witnesses, the flame lit up half of the sky with continuous explosions. Fortunately, there were no casualties as not many students stay on campus due to the summer holiday. The entire campus is currently sealed by the police and the students on campus are also transferred to the nearby hostels to be guided by the teachers. However, the cause of the explosion hasn't yet been clarified so far."

"What's your thought about the accident?"

"We can only say that it's very strange. Everyone knows that it's impossible to even install a natural gas pipeline in the teaching building, not to mention the center of the explosion was on the top floor," The female reporter said in one breath, "Some people speculated that it was a plane crash, some thought it was small meteorites or some even say that it could be the alien arrival. Anyway, I'll immediately return with the message once the police have a definite conclusion."

"Thanks." The host nodded. "Then, let's look at the next news. It's a hot summer and the heat is unbearable. Students should enjoy the long-lost holiday life at home instead of participating in the extracurricular classes. The Department of Education has issued a notice to prohibit private tutoring. Please call the hotline if you encounter any of such cases..."

Roland was not able to continue listening as the scene of the collapsing campus had filled his mind. "Wasn't the Battle of Souls a fictional illusion?" "How could it be possible?"

After standing stoned for a while, he quickly ran towards the door of the living room as he had a sudden realization. A hot wave suddenly poured into the house when he opened the security door.

A modern city appeared in front of him!

The high-rise buildings at a distance formed a dense concrete

jungle. It was a busy street not far away with endless crossing cars and pedestrians. And, he was standing in the corridor of an apartment building. He turned around and saw a gold plate with number 0825 hanging in the middle of the low-grade door. If he did not misunderstand, it meant Room 25 on the eighth floor.

"Excuse me. Please don't block the corridor, will you?"

Roland was slightly surprised. He turned around and noticed that the neighbor's door was opened before he knew and a middle-aged woman was impatiently staring at him. The woman coldly hummed while walking past Roland after he tilted his body to one side. The strong smell of low-quality perfume flowed into his nose at the same time.

"What the heck, having no work and running around with only singlet and underpants. How can an adult be so shameless?" the woman muttered to herself and her voice just happened to float into Roland's ears. Such technique seemed to come in handy for middle-aged women.

Roland walked back into the house and loudly closed the door.

"Come out! Zero!"

"Don't waste the time hiding!"

"Is this your newly designed trick? Piecing pieces of my memories together?"

"Don't be ridiculous. It's simply an illusion!"

Nothing happened in the room even though Roland shouted for a while.

Roland grabbed a glass cup on the table and smashed it on the wall. The cup was instantly broken into pieces.

"Is this how you defeat me?" He sneered to himself. "Trying to trap me in this consciousness forever? You won't be able to lock me up, Zero!"

He immediately acted without any hesitation.

"How can I get away if this is another illusion of the Battle of Souls?" thought Roland.

Suicide was definitely the last option, and Roland decided to start with a simple one—to create a fall.

He moved a few chairs over and stacked them from big to small ones with the back of the chair against the couch so that he would not be wounded even if he failed.

When it was completed, he stepped onto the constantly rocking chairs and climbed slowly to the top. His head was almost touching the ceiling at the moment, and falling backward was indeed scary.



However, this psychological barrier was nothing to Roland as he had experienced different ways to die by now.

He could hear someone unlocking the door from the outside when he was on top of the rocking chairs.

"Perhaps the real owner of this house has returned?" Roland thought.

The highly-stacked chairs collapsed before he could balance himself.

Roland struggled to turn around during the frantic fall and saw a young girl who was about 11 or 12 years old walking into the room with a backpack. However, he could instantly recognize her from her white long hair and light red eyes.

"Zero!"

And, she was obviously surprised to see Roland at the same time.

"What're you doing?! Uncle!"

The picture became twisted in a sudden as if the world was being reversed. Roland quickly bounced up and gasped for air twice. The familiar room reappeared in his eyes.

The gray stone wall with tiny cracks, thick velvet curtains, and the Magic Stone that was silently glowing...

This is... the city of Neverwinter?

"Plunk."

It was the sound made by the wooden pot dropping on the floor.

Roland followed the sound and found that Anna was blankly standing there. The pot that dropped on the floor was spinning and the spilled hot water had wet a huge area of the map.

And, the girl quickly ran to him.

# Chapter 633: [Welcome Back]

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After clinging to each other for a very long time.

Roland stroked Anna's face and said in a gentle tone, "You've... become thinner."

Even though there were tears in her eyes, Anna's eyes were still as pure as lake water. Roland could clearly see his shadow in her blue eyes. But Anna looked much thinner. Through her clothes, Roland could feel her slightly raised backbone and see her prominent collarbones. Her face was not as mellow as before.

"I'm so sorry for letting you worry about me." Smelling the fragrance of Anna, Roland felt quiet in his heart again. It was just a blink of an eye but they felt like that they met each other after a few centuries apart.

Anna shook her head and wiped her tears with his collar, saying, "I'm okay, as long as you woke up."

"For how long was I in a coma? Three days or a week?" Roland was not sure about the numbers when seeing that Anna had become so skinny.

"Over a month."

"What?" Roland was astonished.

"To be exact, it was 52 days." Seeing his stunned face, Anna could not help bursting into laughter and said, "It's Fall now. You should notice that those curtains were changed."

"I was unconscious for nearly two months?" Roland disbelievingly moved his arms and secretly curled his toes. But he did not feel any discomfort.

"How did I eat?"

"You didn't eat anything." Anna leaned on his shoulder with her hands tightly holding his clothes, as if she was very afraid that Roland would fall asleep again. "Someone has eaten in your stead."

"Uh... Is that possible?"

"It's the ability of Nightfall of the Bloodfang Association. She planted a Seed of Symbiosis in your body and so she just needed to eat more than usual."

"A witch's ability could be used like this!" Roland thought that it was amazing because this kind of symbiosis did more than just sustain his life. Due to the fact that the muscles in his hands and feet did not shrink, it was able to connect two living bodies together to share one circulatory system.

Roland sighed for a while and looked at a wooden tub on the ground. "Thanks for taking care of me these days."

"Without a doubt, there must be someone who had cleaned his body and changed his clothes in order to keep him clean in the nearly two-month coma. Besides, this process was very complicated and only Anna who was patient and loving could do it day after day," Roland thought.

"Compared with what you've done, I've done nothing," Anna said gently, "You've honored your commitment to the witches. You've defeated the corps of the church. Each witch of the Witch Union would like to show their gratitude to you, even without me, someone would take care of you."

"But I would prefer that you take care of me." Roland stared at her and lowered his head to kiss Anna.

After a long while, they parted with each other reluctantly. With her cheeks blushing, Anna said, "Well, I must tell the other witches. They've waited for this day for a long time."

"We could continue?" Roland said with a smirk.

Anna slanted her head subconsciously and said, "You've just woken up and you should take a good rest..."

"But I feel like I'm full of energy."

"Even so, we can't continue." Anna raised her hands to hammer him a few punches and then turned around to pick up the tub. She walked towards the door reluctantly and said, "I'll be back soon."

"I've had enough sleep, so don't be worried." Roland gave her a smile.

After Anna closed the door and Roland frowned.

"Why have I slept for such a long time? Does this have a relationship with the strange phenomenon in my dream?" Roland thought.

Roland felt a deep sense of unease.

Generally speaking, after people woke up from a dream, they would forget its content quickly, and even completely forget it in less a day. But until now, Roland still clearly remembered what had happened in his dream.

"Was the little teenage girl really Zero?"

"But why did she call me uncle?"

"Besides, she could not disguise the shock in her face."

The more Roland recalled, the more he considered strange.

The city in his dream was absolutely not where he had lived in the past. The school in the TV represented compelling proof of that. The university should be built beside a mountain and was

part of a scenic area. Towering buildings were not allowed around the university, but he had seen a gray skyline formed by skyscrapers in the background of the news story that played.

Something was also wrong with the apartment. Those walkways connected side by side, which were the most outdated tube-styled apartments. They were built in the 1970s and 1980s and were ill-adapted to both the busy streets hundreds of meters away and the skyscrapers afar.

Besides, the ink-green anti-theft door and outdated desk fan looked a strange match to the hanging colorful TV. If an owner did not have a special hobby, no one would decorate his own living room like this.

Everything seemed to be real while everything was problematic.

Before disappearing, Zero had hysterically shouted at Roland that she would never let him go. Were her words a curse or a threat to Roland? Did she count on creating such a bad dream to confuse him? After all, it would only be a little bluff if she only made him dream several nightmares.

When Roland was still lost in thought, there were noises behind the door.

A group of witches rushed over to the bedroom and surrounded him. In front of them, Roland felt somewhat embarrassed.

"Ahem... In a word, I'm alright. These days..."

Before Roland finished his words, Lightning jumped onto the bed and hugged his neck.

"Thank God," Wendy put her hands on her chest and said in an excited tone, "You finally woke up."

Lily curled her lip and said, "What a troubling guy. You made us worry for such a long time."

Mystery Moon murmured, "Are you worried about others? This is very rare."

"Compared to witches, commoners are much more fragile." Agatha pulled out a Stone of Measuring, watched it before Roland and continued to say, "En, there isn't any magic reaction, and it seems that you didn't inherit Zero's abilities. What can you remember? How about the memories of the Pope."

Roland felt a little surprised and asked, "Do you know this ability?"

"We've held a pure witch of the church captive. We've heard of it from her."

"Re-really? It seems that I didn't receive her memories."



"Wait a moment. What if he isn't the previous Prince Roland. Maybe he's been dazzled by the memories of over 200 years?" Ashes stood up and asked, "Who can prove that he's Roland, not Zero?"

"Come on, don't make trouble. Can you not?" Andrea rolled her eyes at Ashes and said.

"I'm quite sure that he's His Majesty, Roland." Nightingale's voice came from the other side of the bed, but to Roland's surprise, Nightingale did not appear her usual self.

Then Nana, Scroll, Leaf... Among all the caring voices from the witches, Roland felt warmth all over his body.

The last one was Tilly.

She held Roland's hand and said with a smile on her face.

"Welcome back, my brother!"

# Chapter 634: Nothing to Fear

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An hour later, Roland finally figured out what happened when he had been in a coma for more than a month.

Undoubtedly the church had been hard hit as nearly all of the soldiers of the God's Punishment Army were killed, and half of the soldiers of the Judgement Army died on the battlefield. Among the more than 2,000 enemies who fled, most of them had taken the Pill of Madness and would corrode due to the magic power sooner or later.

What was worse, the pope disappeared and most of the senior commanders died in battle. After this battle, Holy City of Hermes would never have the chance to invade the border of the Kingdom of Graycastle. It would even have difficulty in surviving the Months of Demons which would come soon.

But the First Army also suffered heavy losses.

That was mainly caused by the sudden assault of the witch, Blackveil. All those soldiers who saw her eyes and did not wear the God's Stone of Retaliation had been affected to some extent. Of the more than 700 casualties, 80% were caused by her.

The fall of Roland had also greatly undermined the morale of the army.

In such circumstances, Iron Axe had to issue an order to withdraw the troop.

Fortunately, at this time, the function of City Hall had been faultless. With concerted efforts all around, it did not encounter any problems. The statement to the public was that His Majesty was wounded in battle and needed to stay in bed. The funeral of the First Army soldiers killed in battle was also held by Iron Axe and Barov.

After listening to the account of the witches, Roland's interest in the captured pure witches was piqued.

"You just said, they don't have much affection for the church?" He turned to Agatha. "And that witch named Isabella is willing to help us fight the demons?"

"Neither Vanilla nor Margie were cultivated by the archbishop. They were just chosen from the cloister to carry out this task. Nightingale has confirmed it." Agatha replied. "It's strange that Isabella seems not to care about whom she serves, as long as they can defeat the demons. She said she got that idea from the last pope."

"What's your opinion on that?"

"I suggest keeping Isabella for the time being."

"But she's a pure witch raised by the church. She's our enemy!" Scroll frowned and said, "If it were not for her, that witch named Zero wouldn't have had the chance to hurt His Majesty at all."

"As far as I know, Wendy was also raised by the church."

"She's different! She's never used her power to hurt anyone."

"Isabella also did not directly hurt any witch. Her ability only works on the God's Stone, while the witches rarely take the initiative to wear the stones." Agatha refuted. "Nightingale confirmed that she did not lie."

"Is that right?" Roland looked to the other side of the bed.

After quite a while, he heard a reluctant reply from there. "Yeah."

"Most important of all is her ability," Agatha continued, "Isabella mentioned any black-hole formed by the God's Stone of Retaliation had a unique tremor, and she could create an opposite tremor so that the stone would lose its function. Perhaps this is the key to figuring out the secret of Supermagic. I even suspect that she's a natural Supermagic. If we can figure out the relationship between the God's Stone and the magic power, the other witches may also be able to do the same."

Hearing that, the crowd could not help gasping in astonishment.

For most of them, the God's Stone of Retaliation was a shackle which they could not throw off. Due to the restraint of the God's Stone, they were subjected to oppression and exile, and they were helpless in the face of capture by the church and the noble.

Roland thoughtfully stroked his chin. "Creating a tremor to cancel out another tremor? This is basically the same characteristics of the wave. Does it mean that magic power also spreads in accordance with the way a wave spreads?"

"In that case, leave her aside," he said after a moment of pondering, "Wait until I see her."

...

Obviously, the witches were not the only ones in Neverwinter who were concerned about his safety. In the afternoon, Barov, Iron Axe, Karl and other high officials received the news and came to the castle one after another. Everyone had a relieved look after seeing him, especially City Hall Director Barov, who even sobbed when hugging Roland.

As he just awoke, instead of asking too much about political affairs, he just casually chatted with them in order to placate them. His long period absence due to his coma had panicked the insiders of Neverwinter. Now the most important thing to do was to cheer them up and inform everyone that their king had recovered.

In the evening, a sumptuous feast was held in the castle. Almost all of the officials of City Hall and the First Army were present, the lines of tables full of food were even extended to the yard.

What was more, Roland also ordered that they should send carts of hot oatmeal to the square so that all of the citizens could also

participate in this celebration.

After having dinner together, Roland went to his bedroom.

"Nightingale," he said softly.

No one responded.

"Nightingale." He repeated. "I know you're here."

Still no response.

Roland sighed, turned and walked out of two steps. He reached out and felt Nightingale standing there.

He held her up before she prepared to kneel down after appearing out of the Mist.

Well, he seemed to have become stronger.

But that was not important. Roland stared at her fiercely and said before she opened her mouth. "I know you feel guilty. But it's not your fault and I'm safe now. So don't blame yourself anymore. Do you understand?"

"Agatha had reminded me, but I still... Ah, Your, Your Majesty?"

Roland directly hugged her.

This was the first time he brought himself to hug Nightingale.

Roland had originally prepared a lot of words to comfort her, but he changed his mind when he was going to open his mouth.

He knew what she really needed.

Before he was hit by the shadow of Zero, Nightingale pushed him away, regardless of her own safety. The scene where she stood in front of him to protect him was still vivid in his memory. She was prepared to sacrifice herself for him at that moment. So what else should he expect from such a woman?

"Wait for me." Roland whispered. "I'll settle it."

"Settle... what?"

He did not reply, but he knew that Nightingale knew what he meant. Her slightly eager breath was the best proof.

The silence was often an invisible injury.

Since he could not ignore it, he had to take on the responsibility.

Even if it was a path through the thorns.

He felt Nightingale gradually relax in his embrace. After her anxiety was finally relieved, she became determined again.

When someone was vulnerable, a promise would be enough.

Then the expectation was not in vain.

"Ah, I'll wait." She wept.

Her eyes were full of tears, but the sadness disappeared.

The wet and warm tears also filled Roland's heart with determination.

After Nightingale left, he slept soundly that night.

When he opened his eyes, he saw that white ceiling again.

Well... it's this awful dream again.

As he had already known how to get away from the dream, he was quite calm this time.

Rubbing the back of his head which was still aching, he walked out of his bedroom. He saw that white-haired girl carrying the plates out of the kitchen.



"You got up finally." She frowned. "Did you go mad yesterday, uncle?"

# Chapter 635: The Apartment of Souls

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"Zero?" asked Roland hesitantly.

She rolled her eyes and bent down to lay the plates before sitting cross-legged at the coffee table.

"What're you doing there? Don't you want to have breakfast?"

The little girl had a soft tender voice and a slender figure. She wore a light blue dress and white silk stockings. Her feet were about the size of his palms. She was totally not like that crazy Pure Witch who threatened to kill him.

However, she did not deny the name, which meant that she admitted that she was Zero.

"What should I do? Kill her?"

"Now that she's just a little girl, isn't it impossible for her to tear me into pieces bare-handed like an Extraordinary?"

Roland sneaked into the kitchen and hid a fruit knife which he got from the knife shelf into his belt before he slowly walked toward the coffee table.

There was a fried egg and two fried bread sticks on his plate. Well, he got one more than her.

The fried egg had a golden outer ring and slightly scorched edge, its lightly bulged center revealed a faint orange. It was obviously a perfect fried egg with a soft yolk.

Zero skillfully picked up the fried egg with her chopsticks and devoured it in a few bites before she began to eat the fried bread sticks. "What were you doing yesterday? Had you seen some cockroaches on the ceiling?"

"No... I found it a bit dirty so I wanted to clean it." Roland casually made a reason.

"Really?" She glanced at the ceiling and asked, "Why didn't you clean it with a rag tied on a clothing pole?"

"It didn't work. Anyway, it's clean now," he coughed and asked, "you made the breakfast?"

"Uncle, are you alright?" Zero appeared to be a little worried now, "Since I moved here, isn't it I who has always made the breakfast?"

"Since you moved here? So where did you live before?" Roland opened his mouth but did not ask. Obviously she would suspect his identity if he kept asking.

Zero quickly finished her breakfast. She stretched one of her hands in front of him and said, "Give me some money to buy food."

"What?"

"We are running out of food in the refrigerator. I have to go to the food market to buy some. How can I go without money?"

"A middle school student already knows how to buy food from the food market?" Roland thought while fumbling in his pocket for his wallet but found nothing, "Well..."

"In the second drawer of your bedside table," said Zero with a sigh.

He returned to the bedroom and found a nearly empty wallet, in there were about 300 Yuan and several lottery tickets.

"How much do you need?" Roland returned to the living room.

"20. I can't carry more food anyway."

Since it was not his money, Roland generously gave her a fifty Yuan bill and said, "You can keep some for the next time."

Zero took a surprised glance at him and tucked the bill into her coin purse.

"Your hand..." Roland noticed the two band-aids on her fingers.

"I was hurt when I picked up the broken glass. It's not a big deal. Of course, it would be better if you don't litter." She shrugged and carried her schoolbag before walking to the door, "I'm going to school. I won't come back in the noon, so remember to clean the dishes."

"Wait, isn't it summer vacation now?"

"Of course it's the tutoring center," said Zero, putting on her shoes and poked her head out from the door. "Uncle, if you think your head is still hurting, go to see the doctor. And don't do stupid things anymore."

After half a minute, Roland walked out of Room 0825 and looked down while leaning over the corridor railing.

Soon he saw Zero walk out of the building. Her white hair was particularly eye-catching in the crowd. Strangely, people on the street seemed to be used to it as no one walking by her would cast any curious glance at her. She waited a while until another two blonde-haired girls skipped toward her and they left together through an alley.

"So she has made friends in this world?"

Roland could not help rubbing his forehead and thought, "What an absurd dream!"

"What should I do next? Should I follow her?"

He did not believe that Zero could really create a complete city.

When Roland turned around and wanted to go back to the room, looking for the key, he was suddenly startled by what he saw.

A pretty woman walked toward him.

She had long gray hair, high eyebrows and her nose and lips bore a resemblance to those of Tilly. However, she had a cold and arrogant temperament that kept men at arm's length.

He never met her before, but Prince Roland's memory obviously told him that she was his elder sister, Princess Garcia of the Kingdom of Graycastle.

Garcia Wimbledon!

Roland subconsciously reached for the fruit knife in his belt.

"Step aside. Get out of my way," the woman showed a disgusted expression, "Let me pass."

"You... You don't know me?" He was very surprised.

She sneered and said, "Why should I know you? Because your

hair is dyed the same color as mine?"

Roland stared at her, slowly getting out of her way, "You are Garcia, right?"

"So what?" Her expression became gloomy, "Since you know my name, you should know what will happen if I am annoyed. I warn you, you will bring trouble to yourself if you trouble me." She stretched out her right hand and curled her fingers one by one making cracking sounds with her knuckles as if she had prepared to fight.

"She doesn't know me, but why she doesn't feel surprised that I know her name?" Roland found it difficult to understand.

Garcia returned to her room, and the door banged shut behind her. He wandered around along the corridor and took a quick glance when he passed by her room.

The room number was 0827, so she lived next to his neighbor.

Looking at the numerous security doors along the long corridor, he suddenly had a horrible speculation.

"How many households are there in this apartment?"

After all, the corridor was terribly long. Standing in front of Room 27, he could not even see the end of the corridor.

He could not help thinking about it.

He returned to his room as soon as possible, fumbled the key in to the front door and then he locked the door and ran along the corridor toward the further end.

It was not shorter than a 400-meter straight track!

Panting and running to the end of the corridor where it was close to the stairwell, Roland saw the last room number, 0899.

This was simply incredible. Who would design a tube-shaped apartment with nearly a hundred households on one floor? In accordance with the style of the 70s and 80s, a row of more than a dozen households had been considered large-scale.

Roland then climbed up the stairs.

Most of the green paint of the iron staircase handrails had peeled off and he could see the obvious rust and dust. There were numerous small advertisements along the corridor revealing distinctive characteristics of the times. These kind of 'psoriasis' advertisements should have long since disappeared in the big cities.

The top floor was the 22nd floor.



On the security door at the end of the corridor, there was no nameplate or barred window.

He checked one by one until he saw the first number, 2245.

Through his rough calculation, he found that there were 2,124 households in the entire apartment building.

"It's impossible for you to win. I have devoured thousands of soldiers and even an Extraordinary over the years!"

He suddenly recalled what Zero said during the fight for life on the rooftop.

Are all people living here the losers of the Battle of Souls?

Roland was stunned by this speculation.

Now, Zero seemed to have become one of them.

# Chapter 636: Illusory Reality

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Roland climbed more than a dozen floors all at once. When he relaxed his muscles, he felt the intense soreness in his legs.

There were no elevators in this old building. Even if this was only a dream, Roland still felt fortunate that he did not appear on the top floor.

Undoubtedly, Zero must be the one that created this, but this would not only be the act of Zero. No one would retaliate against Roland by using this kind of method.

Why would she spend so much effort to create such a bizarre dream, just to let me witness her failure? This not only took away her memory as a pure witch but also turned her into a fragile middle schooler.

At that moment, many evil ideas flashed through Roland's mind.

With Zero's current status, she would not be able to fight back no matter what Roland did to her.

Would this count as retaliation?

It could be only said that at this moment, Zero indeed did something which created an irreversible twist of memory. However, the final result was something that was far from what she expected.

If this gigantic tube-shaped apartment was the honest reflection of Zero's memory, this was merely just an apartment.

Far away, there was a multitude of skyscrapers, swarms of cars and pedestrians on the street. Apparently this belonged to Roland's memory, a soul that came from the modern world.

Zero and those she engulfed appeared in this dream as modern people. This testified that her scheme was a failure.

That would be a more reasonable speculation.

"What about myself then?"

Roland was pondering this question as he slowly walked down the stairs.

He did not belong here, or at least, he did not belong to this loser tower. One obvious characteristic was that his memory remained intact, and he knew that this was a dream and that he could leave this place anytime he willed it.

Of course, next he had to make a more convenient falling tool, and then go back to the sofa to hit his head. This time Roland could still feel a slight pain which means that the authenticity of the dream could already compare to reality.

That being the case, which step can be done to a greater degree?

Is it encompassing or is it an empty shell?

...

Roland returned to room 0825 and once again examined the residence.

It had a standard layout of three bedrooms and one living room with no terrace. The three single rooms were Roland's bedroom, Zero's bedroom, and one storage room respectively. There were big objects in the storage room. For example, there was an old bicycle without wheels, a sewing machine, and a rusted iron gate. They would not even be worth any money for recycling.

Next, he walked to Zero's bedroom. There was a sign on the door that said, "No unauthorized entry".

Such a caveat was nothing in Roland's eyes.

He pushed open the door without hesitation. A slight but pleasant scent floated into his nose.

It was a tiny room with all the furniture neatly organized. All the blankets were folded, the desk was neat, and the floor was spotlessly clean.

Roland walked around. An anime dairy on the corner of the desk soon caught his attention.

Has she the habit of keeping a diary?

This would be a great opportunity to learn about Zero's past experiences.

There was no emotional pressure on Roland in regards to taking a peek at a little girl's diary in a dream.

Roland picked up the pink book and found that there was a plastic lock on the side of the diary.

However, that would be not enough to stump Roland.

The plastic lock merely served as emotional comfort for kids. It would not actually prevent someone from peeping at the diary. Roland found two toothpicks, stuck the toothpicks into the keyhole and moved the toothpicks back and forth. He opened the plastic lock after only a few tries.

Roland flipped to the first page. The handwriting on the page seemed immature, but there were rarely any ink dots or whiteouts. Apparently, she was very serious when she wrote the diary.

"February 16th, due to the relocation of school, I've been sent to a house in an unfamiliar city. The house-owner is called Roland, a somewhat untidy uncle. He works at a bar and always sleeps

during the day, leaves the house at night, and comes back very late at night. He always has this disgusting smell of alcohol on him." "I don't really want to live here. But my family said that he only asks the minimum rent and provides meals. My family will send me to the countryside if I make another complaint about this house."

"What kind of absurd setting is this?" Roland could not help but seethe. He went to a bar only a few times in his life, not to mention working at a bar. Despite such absurdness, the dream itself was an unreasonable place that often connected numerous unrelated fragments, and no one would notice any difference in the dream.

With that thought, Roland did not feel like fretting over this dream anymore.

"February 27th, school has started. Uncle Roland seems to have lost his job. He looks very depraved. Dinner yesterday was a cup noodle that I bought."

"March 2nd, I've spent all my allowance buying cup noodles recently. This isn't a good sign. The magazine said that at age 12, the body is developing and so there needs to be enough nutrition for growth. I have to talk to uncle. If he beats me up then, I, I'll endure a bit more. I'd rather not go to the countryside."

"March 3rd, he agreed with my suggestion. That's great! Every month he would give me living expenses to buy fresh food. But if I'm not in school, I'll be responsible for making the meals. Who is taking care of whom? I feel like he should give me a salary for this. Never mind, I always do the chores back at home too. I'm used to it."

"June 8th, it has been three months since I arrived in the new city. I've made lots of friends. I have the best grades in my class. Although Uncle Roland is untidy and always seems careless, he's actually not a bad guy. At least he doesn't beat me. The only thing is that he still hasn't found a job yet. Looks like he's giving up soon and that isn't a good sign. We wouldn't be able to survive just depending on the living expense that Uncle Roland's family sends to him. I have to help him."

"June 22nd, umm... It's so difficult to make money. I sold some anime drawings to students in tutoring class and only got 15 yuan. That isn't even enough to buy two days of food. Am I too careless when I speak to uncle? In the end, he's still an adult. I feel like I've been impolite, but I just couldn't control myself. Have I reached my rebellious phase?"

"June 25th, Jesus Christ! I was so frightened today. I saw that Uncle Roland fell from a chair. Good thing that there was a sofa beneath him. Putting the chair that high, was he committing suicide? This was so frustrating. What if he injured himself? That would make him less likely to get a job! Whatever, tomorrow I'll ask him what happened."

Besides the trivial details, Roland spent only half an hour to finish the whole diary. He now understood the reason that Zero had been living with him.

The dream made up backgrounds for everyone that matched with his or her modern identity. This was undoubtedly a very complex structure. He would not be able to accomplish this just by using his

brain. No wonder he was in a coma for almost two months after the soul dual.

He put the diary back to the original place. Roland noticed something that made dazed him for a moment.

There was a stack of books next to the desk. It seemed to be that little girl's textbooks.

Roland swallowed and moved all the textbooks to him.

The first textbook was a literature book and the second was a social science textbook. When Roland saw the third textbook, he was out of breath for a moment.

It was an 8th-grade chemistry textbook.

Its content was simple with only a few words. The majority of the book was pictures. From a glance, it almost looked like the book I Wonder Why . When Roland flipped to the last page, a folded long page fell out.

Roland flattened the page, a complete periodic table of elements appeared before his eyes.



# Chapter 637: Development Plan

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Waking up from the Dream World, Roland sprang out of his bed. Unable to contain his excitement any longer, he draped his coat over his shoulders and hurried to his office. He took out several blank papers and started to write down the missing parts of the periodic table of elements and "Elementary Chemistry" from his memory.

He also concluded some rules from the previous two trips to the Dream World. First, the time passed at a different pace in that world. This was easy to understand, as even a nap was enough for a long, vivid dream. Roland thought it might be caused by the increased response speed of the brain. In a dream, it just needed to pull all the sensory inputs out from the memory and entered them into a dream instead of uploading and processing information from all five senses.

Take the last trip as an example. He had left the Dream World at 3:00 p.m. by falling from a standing herringbone ladder in his bedroom before Zero had come back. Until that time, he had spent eight hours in that world. However, when he woke up in the real world, it was still midnight and the moon was shining high in the sky.

Second, his brain had been so excited in the vivid dreams that traveling to the Dream World did not mean having a rest. This was a tricky problem, as in this way he would be busy for the whole 24 hours of a day. In the day, he had to handle state affairs in the real

world, and at night, he needed to make money to raise the family in the Dream World. He was surprised to find that he himself had become one of the model workers of Neverwinter... and the most hardworking one.

By now, he had not yet tried to sleep in the Dream World. Due to the time differences, he guessed sleeping in it would be more efficient.

Third, the Dream World was different from ordinary dream experiences.

This world was clear, stable and had its own rules. This must have been caused by Zero. She had created this new world about which he knew just a little bit.

He wondered at this world, thinking, "Does it have boundaries? How many fragments does it mix? How much hidden or forgotten information will I discover there?"

He waited out the night until the dawn reached. After having breakfast, he summoned all high officials of City Hall to the reception hall of his castle.

He needed to check on the progress of their works after the whole month, and more importantly, he wanted to work out the development plan for the next development stage for the coming challenge.

Now that the church was no longer a major threat, he had to get ready for the upcoming attacks from demons and put his all into the preparation for the Battle of Divine Will.

Roland set his eyes on the other kingdoms.

Barov wiped his forehead and said, "Uhm... you mean we'll recruit people not only from each domain of Graycastle but also from Everwinter and Wolfheart? Your Majesty, it's a very big project."

Roland said in a deep voice, "The news that the church has suffered a sharp defeat will soon spread all over the continent. After that, Holy City of Hermes can hardly control Everwinter and Wolfheart. Seeing the sign of weakness, those local noble men driven to the church by the wars will turn their backs on it soon. This offers us an exciting opportunity to draw their people to Graycastle with gold royals or even violent measures."

Not being affected by any form of nationalism, people of this era did not care very much about who they worked for, as long as they could bring their families together with them.

Roland continued to explain, "In the next spring, the seaport of Neverwinter will be put into use. All you have to do is to formulate a recruiting plan, rent ships from the Fjords merchants and find places to accommodate the newcomers in the city. I know this will cost City Hall a huge sum of gold royals, but we've got to do this no matter what. All of you know it clearly that the church isn't our ultimate challenge."

As City Hall had lots of related experiences, Roland was confident in this ambitious plan to expand population in a short time.

For example, City Hall had sent emissary delegations to the Southern Territory and the Eastern Region to recruit people for many times before this plan.

As for resettlement work, it also had rich experiences and a whole set of regulations.

City Hall of Neverwinter had already become a reliable and mature administration body.

However, it had no experience in sea transportation. Roland planned to ask Thunder and Margaret's Chamber of Commerce to assist it.

"By the way, in order to lighten your workload, I'll officially hire Miss Edith Kant to work as your adjutant in City Hall." Roland paused a little and continued, "I find no fault with her previous performance in Coldwind Ridge battle and the work in Adviser Department. I believe you'll feel much easier with her help."

Barov said anxiously, "Thank you, Your Majesty, but I can do it on my own..."

Roland interrupted him. "I've decided. Just do what I say."

After that, he turned to look at Scroll, saying, "Education is another focus in the next development stage. How did the training of the secondary teachers go?"

Scroll shook her head and said, "By now, only Ferlin has passed the assessment test. Your Majesty, I'm afraid this method won't work."

"I see." Roland was not surprised by the failure of the plan. As most of the Neverwinter's primary teachers were knights, using the teaching materials written by Scroll, they did not have any trouble teaching the students to read and write.

However, when the Education Ministry wanted to improve the quality of the teachers, it met a problem. The only reason for the knight's reading and writing abilities was that they had had access to education. Being literate did not necessarily mean that they were good at studying.

To become secondary teachers, they need to be qualified in disciplines including math, physics, and chemistry, which were not easy to learn.

Roland thought for a while and made a decision, saying, "Given that, let's pick new secondary teachers from the students. To encourage top students to continue their studies at school, we need to include a scholarship scheme in the budget for the next year."

"Sch-scholarship?" Scroll thought for a moment and continued, "Do you mean the reward system we've adapted in Longsong

Stronghold?"

Roland explained, "No, not at all. That reward system was designed to attract more people to the school, but this scholarship scheme only rewards the top students. It aims to attract them to continue studying in the school by offering them money as much as most workers can make."

Generally, when a student completed universal education and got a diploma, he would try to find a job to raise his family as soon as possible instead of furthering his studies at school. To make sure that people who were good at studying would get better trained, he must build a special fiscal fund, namely, a scholarship scheme, to subsidize those people.

Roland continued to explain his plan to Scroll, "First, you can set high standard score to pick out only 20-30 students who'll be paid for with scholarships, and then you work with Ferlin to teach them. Their learning speed must be much faster than that of those knights. After the training, anyone who passes the assessment is qualified to become a secondary teacher whose starting monthly salary is 50 silver royals, and the ones who fail in the assessment can apply for the other jobs."

When he got the first batch of secondary teachers, he planned to soften the terms of the scholarship scheme and promote the higher level of knowledge and education among the people.

# Chapter 638: The Temptation of the Periodic Table of Elements

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Barov said, "Your Majesty, City Hall has no problem with this program, but... we don't need that many secondary teachers, do we?" Knowing that Edith would soon become an official member of City Hall, Barov looked a little unhappy but still focused on the subject of the discussion. Roland was pleased to see this mature reaction.

The prince ticked off the other jobs those students could do, saying, "they don't have to become secondary teachers. With better education background, they can choose to become researchers and managers in the plants. They should understand the principles behind the machines instead of simply knowing how to operate them. They should know how to train workers, how to maintain or, perhaps, improve equipment. The Ministry of Education must make efforts to turn our people into industrial personnel. Otherwise, it'll be meaningless to have a large population."

"Industrial Personnel?" Scroll repeated Roland's words in a low voice and then asked, "does it refer to the people engaged in industrial production?"

"Almost." Roland confirmed and continued to explain his idea. "the people who have finished universal education can become ordinary workers, namely, junior industrial personnel. By having more of them, we could scale up our industrial production, but industrialization isn't just about scale... City Hall won't be able to take care of everything, so I want to see two to three out of a hundred people get secondary or even higher education level. They

can be placed on both production and management positions, so did the secondary teachers. By doing so, we'll see that the plants will become independent organizations who can develop themselves following the instruction of City Hall."

Without education, Neverwinter could not enjoy its population dividend no matter how many people it had. Due to the limited education resources, he could not make secondary and higher education universal right now. To quench his thirst for talents, he decided to use this scholarship scheme to quickly select and foster a batch of capable people for the city. As to the other people, in his plan, as long as they finished primary education and became literate, they would fill ordinary production positions, like a cog in a machine.

"I see," Scroll said.

Roland tapped on the table and added, "There's another thing. Add ideological education to the universal primary education. I'll give you a detailed teaching plan later." He could not help but recall the contents of the textbook of ideological and moral education he had read in Dream World. In this era, strengthening ideological and moral construction was as important as adapting steam engines.

Seeing Scroll nodded, he stood up and glanced at everyone in the hall, saying, "to sum up, this year and the next, City Hall should focus on expanding the population, enhancing education and upgrading industrial production, especially the first two tasks. They'll determine how far we can go. I hope that all of you will do your best before the arrival of more dreadful and powerful



enemies!"

"We'll do our best for Your Majesty!"

All the officials stood up and said simultaneously.

"And it's also for yourselves." Roland heaved a sigh of relief and continued. "That's all for today's meeting, and... Kyle Sichi, come to my office."

...

Chief Alchemist followed Roland to the office. As soon as he closed the door, he asked straightforwardly, "Your Majesty, do you have any new idea or new product to make? If not, I hope I can go back to my lab earlier."

Roland could not help but smile, saying, "You're still so impatient. Come on, sit down. I've something important to give you."

After Kyle took a seat with incredulity on his face, Roland slowly picked up his cup to sip some tea and asked, "How are the alchemists from the king's city?"

Chief Alchemist replied with a frown, "I guess they're just fine. I don't talk with them very much, except about the chemical experiments. If you want to know, you can ask them directly."

Roland could tell from Kyle's reaction that alchemists of Alchemist Workshop of the king's city seemed to have formed a little clan of their own. They had brought many students here, which was helpful for the chemical industry production but at the same time put pressure on Kyle and his students.

Keeping this thought to himself, Roland changed a subject. "Now that the two acid liquids and smokeless gunpowder have gone into mass production, I plan to set up an independent department to meet with ever-growing demands for these products." He paused a while and continued. "Do you want to work as Minister of Chemical Industry?"

Kyle answered without any hesitation, "I remember you've mentioned it before, but... I'm sorry, Your Majesty. I just can't give up my experiments in the labs for some trivial management work, so my answer is still the same."

"Do not hurry to refuse me." Roland shrugged. "I know that you don't want to waste your time on this kind of things, as you devote yourself to chemistry and want to explore its mystery... But what if I can directly show you what you want to know? "

"What?" Kyle Sichi was startled.

Roland took something out from his drawer and slowly spread it in front of Kyle. It was a white paper with many squared on it — the periodic table of elements, which he had written last night.

"Th-This is..." The old alchemist's eyes went straight to it. Stretching out his trembling hands, he wanted to snatch it from the king but meanwhile was so afraid to tear it.

"Didn't you say... you forgot the contents in the blanks?"

"I've remembered lots of details recently, including some about the book 'Intermediate Chemistry'. This time it'll be completed." Roland pulled the table back a little so that Kyle could only stare at it.

"Your Majesty, I..." Kyle stopped here and closed his mouth, since he had already got what the king meant.

Roland smiled and said, "That's right. If you become Minister of Chemical Industry, I'll give you this periodic table of elements, complete 'Intermediate Chemistry' and maybe even 'Advanced Chemistry'."

Roland admired the Chief Alchemist's enthusiasm toward chemistry but also knew that limited by this era's conditions, Kyle could hardly know more chemical knowledge than a senior high school student did in modern times. Now that he had complete chemistry textbooks, he decided to show them to Kyle. By doing so, he could enable Kyle to have more time to teach more students and effectively reduce the influence of Alchemist Workshop of the king's city.

He also believed that although Kyle preferred chemical experiments to trivial matters in management, as the former Chief

in the Alchemic Workshop of Redwater City, he must have a sound knowledge of management, and basic organization and coordination skills.

"I... get it." Kyle bowed after hesitating for a moment. "I'll serve as your minister."

Somehow, Roland found that compared to imposing his will on the others, he became increasingly fond of this method of offering conditions that could not be denied as a bargaining chip in negotiations. He wondered was this syndrome of a person in power.

No matter what, he believed that it was a win-win option.

He folded the periodic table of elements and handed it to Kyle, saying, "When you've more students, you'll have less trivial things to do by yourself. Here's your bonus paid in advance. Do your best, and your name will be recorded in the history of chemistry."

# Chapter 639: Isabella

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If not for the shackles on her hands and feet, Isabella would have forgotten that she was a prisoner .

After she had told Roland's witches that the God's Stones of Retaliation embedded in the walls of the cell could not affect her ability, she had been transferred to an ordinary bedroom guarded by some guards. When she had been sent back to the Western Region of Graycastle, she had got a "cell" similar to the previous bedroom. It was not damp or cold and had no dirty water flowing on the ground. In this quite spacious room, she was offered a bed, a bench and a toilet in a cubicle. All the windows of the room were blocked by iron strips, but warm sunshine could still get through them into the room. The conditions here were much better than that of the secret jail of Pivotal Secret Authority.

Having outstanding looks, she had thought that she would get some "normal" treatment of prisoners of war, but nothing had happened. No one had sneaked into her room at night. She had not been humiliated or tortured. The guards at the door never spoke to her except when they delivered meals to her.

The most frequent visitors to her cell were two of Roland's witches. One was said to come from 400 years ago and another one who was blonde always wore a hood. No matter what they had asked, Isabella had answered them honestly. She had even asked them to bring her papers and a quill to write down some recordings of the secret history and demon documents she had read in Pivotal Secret Temple's Library.

The witches had never tortured her either, but she could tell that the blonde witch wanted to give her a hard time. She felt confused seeing her leave with a cold face every time when she finished answering all their questions.

She knew that they would not believe whatever she said, and based on what had happened during each of their visits, she was sure that one of them must be able to detect lies. She guessed that the blonde witch was planning to punish her when she caught her lying, but this thought made her even more confused. She just could not think of a reason for this action, as they could do whatever they want to a prisoner.

She felt increasingly oppressed by worry as the time went by.

She wondered why Roland Wimbledon had never appeared during the past two months.

She could think of only two answers to this question. First, the king had not woke up yet. Second, he never planned to meet her. Neither of these was good news for her. She believed that after she confessed all she knew, she would be put on trial and then executed.

Ready to devote all she had to defeat demons, Isabella had no complaints about her current situation, but waiting to die day after day still stressed her out.

She sighed and walked in chains to her bed. She sat down, picked up her quill and spread a blank paper on her laps, thinking that if

she could finish writing down all she remebered quickly, she would be able to come to her end sooner.

At this moment, she heard footsteps outside.

It sounded like more than two people were coming to her cell.

Isabella's heart vibrated.

Her door was pushed open. She put down the quill and turned around. Besides the two witches, here came a gray-haired young man. Based on the previous information she had received, she knew he was Roland Wimbledon, the King of Graycastle.

He woke up?

"Does he come to sentence me?"

Keeping those thoughts to herself, she stood up and slightly bowed to him.

She said with feigned indifference, "I thought you would never come to meet me."

To her great surprise, Roland said calmly, "You're Isabella, right? You're the witch who made my God's Stones of Retaliation lose effect. I didn't meant to postpone this meeting with you. I had an incredible long dream and just woke up. I fought against Zero in

the dream and I defeated her in the end. However, as the winner, I didn't get everything, her knowledge or skills, as she said."

"It's impossible!" Isabella blurted.

Roland asked with great interest, "Why? I guess I can't get what she had, as I'm a man who can never become a witch."

"It's nothing to do with gender." Isabella shook her head. "The trophy a winner will get in Soul Battlefield is memories and lifespan, which can be owned by any human being, and only the creatures who have those two things can step into Soul Battlefield. As for the abilities of witches and magic power, they can't be absorbed by the winner. Otherwise, Zero would have absorbed me."

"What do you mean... There're creatures she can't invade and absorb?"

Isabella explained, "Animals can't get into the Soul Battlefield, as they've no intelligence. Even if they did and win, they can never understand human beings' memories."

"That may also be caused by the difference between species."

"As far as I know, among the thousands of souls she absorbed, there're some demon and some hybrid demonic beast." She sighed and continued. "But it happened before I was born. I've just heard her mention about it when we were chatting."



"Demon and... demonic beast?" Hearing what Isabella said, Roland and his witches could not help but look at each other at a loss for words.

"Why didn't you tell us about this?" The blonde witch shouted this question to Isabella.

"Because this will only increase your anxiety and hardly helps you." Isabella paused and slowed down to explain. "Even Zero herself admitted that the memories of the other species were so crazy that they placed a heavy burden on her. She said she had never tried it again after that."

The king did not seem to be scared. Instead, he smiled and said, "Interesting. By the way, did Zero mention to you what would happen to the losers in Soul Battlefield?"

"They'll disappear from this world as if they never exist."

Roland raised his eyebrow and asked, "Any difference between the losers who give up voluntarily and those who fight to death?"

"All of them will disappear, but..." Isabel continued after a thought. "Zero seemed to have said that the memories she absorbed could be divided into two kinds."

Roland seemed particularly interested in this issue and asked, "What are they?"

"One kind of memories were disorganized with residual consciousness of the losers. They would affect Zero herself. The other kind of memories were completely open to her. She could read them whenever she wanted." She paused for a moment and continued. "She said that it was harder to recall and easier to forget the first kind of memories... She casually mentioned it once. I didn't ask her for more details at that time, but I'm sure you're an exception. I've never seen anyone like you before, who get no memories at all."

Roland closed his eyes and knitted his eyebrows, he seemed to be thinking about something extremely complicated. He remained speechless for nearly 10 minutes and then heaved a long sigh, saying, "I see."

"What on earth was he thinking?"

Curious as she was, she still kept her mouth shut.

She knew that she should never ask such a question as a prisoner.

Roland said to her, "Now, let's talk about you."

# Chapter 640: Dream World Hypotheses

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Isabella slightly lowered her head, waiting for her sentence in silence.

Roland sounded calm. "You should thank your own ability, not because it's unique, but because it can't kill anyone. No matter how felonious an act you're involved in, such as assisting Zero in attacking me, you're just an accessory offender. I can spare your life, but you still have to atone for your sin, like the others who violate the law."

Roland's words somehow took a weight off her mind. She was not afraid of death, but not fond of it, either.

"As long as you can defeat demons, I'm willing to do everything for you."

Roland said slowly, "demons are enemies of the mankind. I'll certainly fight against them till death, but my way is different from that of the church. I won't try to win the Battle of Divine Will at the cost of destroying human beings' potential. Given that, you've got to change some of your habits. From now on, you're no longer a Pure Witch of the church. Instead, you're an atoning witch."

Zero, you were wrong. He knew about demons and the Union a long time ago and is even ready to fight the Battle of Divine Will. Indeed, he was a common man whose life and belief would come to the end after decades, but now, he gets your limitless lifespan.

Given that, he must be the chosen one of the deities.

At this thought, Isabella knelt down with her shackles. She lowered her head, letting all her long hair spread over the floor, and said, "yes, my lord."

When she stood up again, Roland opened his mouth and said, "here's not the Holy City of Hermes, and you're not a servant to me. You're just an atoning person, but I won't send you to the mines to do hard labor for twenty years. All you have to do is to cooperate with Agatha in her research on the magic power.

Isabella was startled, wondering, "that's all I have to do for him?"

Roland continued to say, "your atoning period is five years. I'll ask Wendy to arrange a new place for you to live and during this period of time, you don't have to wear any shackles, but you only have limited freedom. That's to say, besides your living place and Agatha's Spellcaster Tower, if you want to go anywhere else, you'll have to act under the Witch Union's surveillance."

"Yes, I see."

"By the way, are you sure that there are no other witches in the Holy City?" asked Roland.

She had answered this question for many times since she had become a prisoner. She thought for a moment and still shook her head, saying, "for this decisive battle, Zero converted all the useless

new witches into God's Punishment Warriors and took all the other witches to the battlefield. There're still many girls in cloisters, but awakenings of new witches seldom happen before Months of Demons. Vanilla, Margie and me are probably the only three remaining Pure Witches of the church."

Having heard what she said, Roland said nothing. He turned around and walked toward the door. The blonde witch came up and unlock her shackles.

Seeing herself get free hands again, Isabella could hardly believe what had happened. Is this my sentence? No jail time, no humiliation and no torture. Is he serious?

She suddenly spoke out, "Your Majesty, what about Vanilla and Margie..."

Roland looked back at her and said, "they're better than you. They were just influenced by the distorted ideas of the cloisters' education, far from being crazy. If they can give up those thoughts, they may even join the Witch Union."

Roland and the two witches left. The cell door creaked shut.

"So that's it," Isabella felt completely relieved. She lay on her plank bed in the sunshine coming through the window. Despite the glaring light, she squinted up at the blue sky behind the steel bars.

"What a lovely day," she thought.

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Back in the office, Nightingale expressed her discontent, saying, "her punishment is too light. She almost killed you."

"It's Zero who almost killed me, not her." Roland handed her a piece of dried fish.

She took it with her mouth and mumbled, "she created such a chance for Zero. Otherwise, it was impossible for you to be dragged into Soul Battlefield."

Roland explained patiently, "but you can tell she really wants to fight against demons, can't you? She didn't commit an unforgivable crime, and I'm just alright. That's enough for her punishment. By doing so, we show all the people that we're willing to spend a thousand pieces of gold to buy outstanding talents."

"Spend a thousand gold royals...and what?"

"Uhm... I mean propaganda effects." Roland coughed twice and continued. "Seeing her example, more people will understand that as long as they don't break legal bottom line, they'll still get a chance by making atonement. After all, our enemy is demons. To increase our odds of winning the Battle of Divine Will, letting her redeem herself by good services is the best choice."

Nightingale twitched her lips and said, "well, I'll watch her for you."

Roland walked to the French window and recalled what Isabella had said.

The memories Zero absorbed could be divided into two kinds. One kind of memories was disorganized with a residual consciousness of the losers. They would affect Zero herself. The other kind of memories were complete and open to her. She could read them whenever she wanted. She said that it was harder to recall and easier to forget the first kind of memories...

Is this the reason why she repeatedly persuaded me to give in during the Battle of Souls?

She suffered no side-effects in absorbing the surrenders who willingly gave her all their memories. That's why she stopped at all the crucial moments.

She wanted me to give up fighting, in order to get my complete memories.

He found that this process seemed similar to the one in which he possessed Prince Roland's body.

As Prince Roland's memories were just like that, complete and always there in his head. He could easily recall the prince's memories anytime he wanted to and put them aside when he did

not need them. They were like archived files. He did not have to memorize any detail of them, but even after a year when he opened them again they still remained the same as before.

Given that Prince Roland had been killed by Garcia's assassin and had no willpower to resist his death at that time, he thought he could be considered a loser who gave up in the Battle of Souls.

Now, he was wondering what the strong-willed losers would do?

Based on what Isabella had said, this kind of memories with the residual consciousness of the losers would affect Zero herself, including changing her thoughts, personality, and even beliefs. Absorbing thousands of souls had made her complex, technically, a very different person from who she had been before.

If she had wanted vengeance on him, she would have poured all those crazy memories into his mind.

When that happened, she would end up being shattered, but Roland would not be the same Roland as before.

In this chaotic storm of memories, each unyielding soul's willpower would strive for predominance in his mind. Zero would take this chance to come back again.

However, out of Zero's expectation, he was not a man of this era.

The amount of information a person living in the modern age



absorbed in one day was equivalent to that of a person in ancient times did in months or even years. As a man from an era of information explosion, he read and memorized various kinds of information in every waking moment. His mind could keep the useful information and eliminate the meaningless ones by instinct.

As a result, all the memory fragments were swallowed up and reorganized, forming a strange new world, his Dream World.

Unfortunately, he could not ask Zero to confirm this speculation.

She had lost all she had including her memories and turned into an innocent child in Dream World.

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# Chapter 641: The Door to the Fragment

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Now he was responsible for raising the newborn.

Roland yawned while getting up from the bed. He noticed that the ladder that he had used for falling was still laid on its side and that beyond the blinds, it was bright.

He had been wearing clothes when he fell from the ladder, and yet now he had nothing on but a pair of boxers. "Was this caused by the inertia of the subconscious?" It seemed that every departure from the Dream World would continue for some time until he fell asleep again, which would ensure that every time he entered the dream, it would be the exact moment he woke up in the Dream World... "How formalized was that?!"

He decided to depart the Dream World at midnight to see if he could eliminate the sleepwalking-like unconscious behavior.

In addition, Roland also felt exhausted from the lack of sleep, totally unlike someone who had just woken up. His eyes were bloodshot and dry, and his mind was fogged. He also could not stop yawning. He had stayed up for more than 20 hours if he counted the time in the Dream World too.

Roland thought that maybe he had better catch some sleep in the afternoon.

Roland put on a short-sleeved shirt and walked into the living room where he saw the diminutive figure again.

"You're up so early today?" Zero looked a bit surprised. "I haven't even started to make breakfast yet... You wait here for a while. I'll go and prepare it now."

Obviously, Zero just got up as well. Her white long hair hanging disorderly over her shoulders with wisps of hair sticking up, she looked completely different from the usual her who was neat and quick. She was still wearing the pale blue dress with white stockings, which, if Roland was not mistaken, had been worn for three days. Since Zero had kept her bedroom tidy, it must be definitely due to her shortage of clothes to change into rather than laziness or insanitation.

Somehow, Roland felt quite bitter in his heart.

Not only for her, but also for himself.

Roland could not believe it when thinking of the 300... no, 250 yuan in his pocket. How could he, the founder of the Dream World, and Zero, the trigger for the Dream World, descend to such a state? It could not be more tragic.

Roland would not let the situation worsen, since money was necessary when he wanted to buy books or explore this Dream World. He had to find a way to seek a stable income. 250 yuan could not even pay for a taxi, let alone to pay food and utilities.

When Roland was absorbed in thought about how to make money, Zero had busied herself in the kitchen.

She rapidly lit the fire to heat the pan before pouring in oil and heating it up. With a single hand, she cracked an egg and splattered it into the pan. Although the pan was too heavy for her to shovel up and down, she could just use a spatula to scramble the egg.

As the heated oil was sizzling in the pan, the tantalizing aroma of an omelet soon filled the living room.

Because of the limited cost of living, their breakfast had barely changed. Roland had two fried fritters and a fried egg, just as usual, and Zero had only one fried fritter.

"Were these fritters bought yesterday?" Roland took a bite and found it no longer crisp.

"Of course." Zero grunted. "They were the last fritters in grocery store last night, so they were especially cheap. Sometimes the owner would give me some of the raw flour dough from which I can simply make several fritters on my own."

Roland was surprised and asked, "Did you do the same thing at your home?"

"Almost." The little girl shook her head, saying nothing more. She seemed unwilling to talk about her family. After breakfast, she dressed up simply before carrying the bag and heading off to school. She walked to the door and said, "Uncle, as usual, I'll be out until noon. You have to wash the dishes."

"Ah, just go. Take care!" Roland nodded.

Zero could not help but get startled. After a while, she said yes and went out.

Well, it was time to check and count his property.

He returned to his bedroom and checked every corner of the bedside cabinets and wardrobe, sorting out all his belongings.

Firstly, it was the wallet that also contained an ID card and a credit card as well as the over 200 yuan. It looked so shabby. Roland, of course, threw some expired lottery tickets straight into the trash can. Even if those tickets drew prizes, they were overdue. Moreover, he simply did not believe anything with such a small probability would fall on him.

Secondly, there was a cell phone that had a completely empty contact list except for the bank information that showed him the cash flow in his card. Having read the message from the bank, Roland noticed that Zero's parents would send 1,500 yuan to him at the end of each month. But now, four days to the next remittance, there was only 20 yuan left in the card, which would be only enough to save him from starvation. In this case, there was no way for him to do other things.

Finally, there were some pieces of jewelry seemingly made of gold, and yet Roland was not sure about it. He wondered if they were prepared for marriage. If he sold them to a gold shop, Roland

might earn almost 1,000 yuan, which could be used for emergencies.

This was all his disposable wealth.

But it barely helped the current situation, Roland sighed. He then turned his eyes towards the furnishings in the lumber-room.

He opened the door in the far end of the suite and looked at some old items in the room.

The iron bicycle and sewing machine, which was covered with dust and cobwebs, would presumably be worth 30 to 40 yuan due to its material, especially the latter one which was extremely heavy and hard for him to move alone. And the big iron door, which could count as scrap iron, might be worth over 100 yuan. These piddling amounts of money might seem of little importance in Roland's eyes at the usual time, but they were quite precious to him now.

If he went to a secondhand bookstore to buy abandoned schoolbooks, over 100 yuan would be enough to cover the used books of all subjects.

He made up his mind at the thought.

Roland remembered that there were small ads posted on the stairwell, which included the phone number of a recycle station. But before selling them, he had to clean them up first.

Roland thought that maybe they would be worth more if he made them cleaner.

Gasping, he carried and dragged the bicycle and sewing machine to the living room, and then he found something wrong.

The thick, big iron door did not seem to lean against the wall of the lumber-room, but was built into the wall!

"Damn it. Which bastard did this? What's the meaning of making a door on this wall? It's the outer wall of the apartment. Is it to make it more convenient for someone to commit suicide?"

"And there's also a lock hanging ridiculously on the door!"

"Wait..." It occurred to him that two keys were attached to his key ring.

Roland immediately went and fetched his keys which included the key to the main door. He put the other key into the keyhole. Unexpectedly, they were well matched.

With a click, the rusty lock flicked open and fell from the bolt.

Roland did not bother to pick it up but just pulled the bolt and forcibly opened the iron door.

The cold wind tangled with the snow and stormed in. This made him, who wore a short-sleeved shirt and a boxers tremble.

To his astonishment, there was a snow world behind the iron door.

He could dimly see a greige city surrounded by snow mountains that waved up and down far away. Built along the walls on both sides of the crack in the mountain, the city was wrapped in a big breach. In the center of the city, a towering building stood erect in the howling wind, like a pillar connecting to heaven.

Although it was the first time for him to see such scene, Roland immediately realized where it was.

"New Holy City, Hermes"

A stronghold city was built on the fractured area of the Impassable Mountain Range.

It was also a symbol that signified the mightiness and toughness of the church.



# Chapter 642: First Exploration

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"Bang!"

Roland fiercely shut the door and took a deep breath.

The Snow that adhered to him quickly melted into water.

Although he had long understood that dreams were variable, this scene still shocked him.

Roland walked to the window of the lumber-room and looked out to check the outer wall. The wall was flat and neat without even a trace of being inlaid a door or repaired.

In other words, the door was inlaid into the wall while the apartment was "finished", rather than being built in afterwards.

So... was the door only in room 0825, or in every flat?

If the door was also built into other flats, what kind of scene did they have and where did they lead to?

Roland felt excited about this idea.

He returned to his bedroom and rummaged through the wardrobe before slipping on a set of winter clothes. The dilapidated coat he picked looked like it had lost most of its

feathers and the wool in the knitted scarf was forked, but since he did not have a better choice at this moment, he had to get accustomed to them.

It was a hot summer day, after he put on the warm clothes, Roland felt he was surrounded by stoves, sweating profusely, his body temperature soaring.

Once again he walked close to the iron door. He kicked off the flip-flops and replaced them with a pair of green leather shoes before pushing open the door and stepping out.

The moment he entered the snow world, the cold wind howled through the gaps of his collar and cuffs and drilled into his body. When the cold wind met the hot sweats on his skin, he felt extremely icy cold and could not help sneezing.

"Wait, if I keep this door open, does it mean that I'll have an air conditioner that costs no power?" Roland thought.

He wondered what Zero would think this scene.

Roland rubbed his nose and looked back. The door looked like it was connected with a basement that was half buried in the slope. There were many similar low storehouses around this area which were obviously built by farmers or merchants who lived outside the city. But Roland noticed that these storehouses were unguarded, as if the entire campsite was abandoned.

However, what really marveled Roland was the scene that was hundreds of meters away from the slope.

He saw a clear boundary of this world.

As far as he could see, the snow slope was abruptly cut in the middle while spall floated in the mid-air as if they had become weightless. Violent cyclones and endless darkness took place in that space. Occasionally a bolt of scarlet lightning crackled through the sky, illuminating the border area, and even so, the darkness stretched out beyond what he could see.

This scene was appalling but extraordinarily magnificent. If he could put words on it, it was like a lonely island floating in the void. The boundary had spread along the mountain land until it disappeared in the snowstorm. Undoubtedly, there must be another similar boundary on the other side of Holy City, but it was too far away for him to see it now.

Was this the memory fragment that remained in Zero's mind?

Roland did not dare go near the boundary to see through it. Both the violent wind that ripped the spall and the lightning that crackled the sky were dangers to him. He also did not immediately move towards Holy City. Overlooking from here, he estimated that it would take him at least half an hour to reach the city. It would take longer if he had to wade through the ankle-deep snow. He needed sufficient preparation.

After that, Roland wandered through this suburban campsite.

He could not find anything alive, whether in half-buried storehouses, dwelling houses or tents. All of the people just seemed as if they had vanished.

It was somewhat like the Soul Battlefield for him, nothing more than a stage built with memory.

Accordingly, Holy City should be unmanned as well.

Although there was no trace of life around, the storehouses were well filled, like a freeze-frame of the memory from when it was spun off.

Those fresh grapes in Roland's hand would be an example to illustrate his point.

Roland found them in the small basement next door. The iron lock on the door could not stop him. He simply twisted off the lock and the bolt with a wrench he found in the house. There was plenty of food in it, like cured jerky, fillets, wheat, and even a small half-box of grapes.

The grapes looked very fresh. They must have been carried from the old Holy City beneath the plateau. When Roland put one into his mouth, he could still taste its cool sweetness.

His biggest gain was a small iron box he had found in a hidden compartment in the basement. It was not because of his careful

searching but simply because it had opened when he entered the basement. An oil lamp was lit beside it, as if someone abruptly vanished at the moment he was putting things into the compartment. The compartment was left open, revealing the half-hidden iron box.

The box contained over 10 gold royals and several translucent gemstones that were clearly of high quality. Roland pocketed all of them without hesitation.

After he confirmed the things in the memory fragment could be taken into his flat, he got busy at once.

After two hours of hard work in the snow ground, Roland moved anything valuable into his house. It included lots of food and several armaments, such as armor, short swords, and crossbows. The former would save on the expense of food while the latter might be worth some money if he sold them online.

Roland kept carrying things from the campsite into the lumber-room until the room was filled. After that, he had no choice but to lock the door with reluctance.

He felt so good after picking up so many things for free.

He could not hold back laughing when he thought there was a whole Holy City for him to plunder.

The wealth of the whole city would probably make him rich

overnight. Living expenses were absolutely no problem for him now.

Roland was panting as he took off his clothes. When he was about to go and have some water, a turn of sharp dizziness suddenly struck him.

"What's going on?" He stumbled towards the tea table. But before he made it, he felt his field of view turn upside down, followed by a bang and then darkness took him.

...

When Roland woke up again, he found himself in his bedroom lying on the bed, aching all over as if he had been through a marathon.

The night had enshrouded the city outside the blinds, indicating that he had been asleep for more than one or two hours.

Roland thought that it was probably because of his overtiredness, as well as the heatstroke caused by the alternate strike of coldness and heat. And that he probably should have caught some sleep before his labor.

But to his surprise, he did not feel much feeble at this moment. Instead, he was full of energy and so he disregarded the ache. It seemed as if a warm current was running through his body over and over again, causing his sense of touch to be super acute.

That was when Roland sensed a faint breath near his pillow.

He turned his head slightly and found Zero who was leaning beside him.

She was holding a wet towel, half her cheeks illuminated by moonlight, her eyelashes trembling slightly, her back moving up and down along with her breath.

Probably because the room was excessively sweltering, her dress was soaked and her arms covered with fine beads of sweat, sending out a unique aroma.

Roland knew that it must be the little girl who dragged him from the living room into the bedroom. Moreover, she tried the basic way to cool him down. He smacked his lips and could still taste the residual of the patchouli liquid in his mouth.

"How did she manage to pour the liquid in?" thought Roland.

Roland shook his head with resignation at the sight of Zero who slept defenselessly. He got up quietly and carried her to the bed. After that, he walked softly back to the living room. Zero who cared so much about the tidiness of her bedroom must have been unwilling to go to her own bed before taking a bath. He just simply left her on his bed.

Anyway, it was dirty enough.

Lying on the couch, he noticed that the ache was fading and that he could increasingly sense the warm current in his body.

Roland realized that it was not an illusion.

But something hard to describe.

He dug into his trouser pocket for a gold royal that he had brought out from the memory fragment and held it in his palm.

He willed the warm current to gather in his palm.

Roland clenched his fist, and when he unclenched it, the gold royal had been folded into a half-moon shape.



# Chapter 643: How to Make a Fortune

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The next morning, Roland opened his eyes as the first ray of sunlight shone into the living room.

The fan had kept blowing hot air all night, and cicadas were shrilling their familiar songs outside the window.

Now he had confirmed that the sleep in the Dream World would not get him back to reality, and Roland thought that he could rest during sleep.

Although this may sound a bit weird... Who cares. It doesn't matter if it works.

Yawning, he got off of the couch. When he was about to go to the kitchen to prepare breakfast, he heard Zero screaming in the bedroom.

After a moment, she appeared at the door, her face blushed. She pointed to Roland, stammering. "Yesterday I... You..."

"I slept on the couch last night." Roland shrugged. "Please, you're sweaty and unwashed. I would certainly not sleep with you."

The little girl pulled her collar to take a sniff and then she blushed even more like a ripe apple contrasting with her long white hair. In a flurry, she ran back to her bedroom, fiddled for a while, and rushed into the bathroom with clean clothes.

Soon came the sound of showering from the bathroom.

By the time she came out, Roland had finished preparing breakfast.

Today's breakfast was much heartier than the usual ones. Fried bacon, salt pepper egg, roasted dried fish, and a plate of fresh grapes.

Of course, they were all made of what he had taken from Holy City behind the iron door.

"You bought meat?" Zero asked in surprise, her hair wrapped in a wet towel. Roland could see her throat slightly stirring, apparently swallowing.

"Yeah, I bought a lot and put it all in the fridge." Roland handed her a pair of chopsticks. "I found a new job."

"Did you?" she asked suddenly with an excited voice, seemingly forgetting what had just happened.

"Yeah, I'll get paid soon." Roland laughed. "These were bought for celebration."

The little girl was relieved. "I thought you finally crossed your bottom line and did something irreparable."

"What does she mean by 'something irreparable'?" he thought inwardly, "Did she really think I would steal or rob? Uh... Robbery doesn't seem a big deal in the Dream World."

"So the reason that you had heatstroke was due to staying out in the sun too long looking for a job yesterday?"

" Probably..." he said as he threw a grape into his mouth, "In short, there's no need to worry about money anymore."

"You're so weak," Zero curled her upper lip and said, "When will I be able to stop worrying about you?"

Roland was almost choked by grapes as Zero said that. He retorted. "You make me feel like you've been worrying about me all the time."

"Uh..." This reduced her to silence. After a while, she glared at Roland. "You've really wasted ingredients when cooking breakfast. You added salt to the salty bacon!"

"She seems really good at changing the topic," Roland thought as he picked up a slice of bacon and place it into his mouth. "I think it's quite good except some corners of it were not well fried."

"You should leave it to me in the future." Zero complained, but she quickly gulped down the food on the dishes. Then she took her bag and was about to leave. "You just leave the dishes there. When

I come back, and I'll wash them together with dishes for dinner."

"Wait," Roland stopped her and asked, "Is there a secondhand bookstore nearby? Do you know where it is?"

...

This time he had stayed in the Dream World for three days before detaching from it. When he woke up in Neverwinter, the sun had risen high in the sky.

It seemed the speed of time in the Dream World was eight times faster than here, which meant a night in Real Word would count as two days in the Dream World. Moreover, if he delayed his departure until the third day, others would just think he woke up late in the morning.

The first thing Roland wanted to do after getting up was to find a gold royal and clench it.

It turned out that the gold royal did not change even a little bit, but his fingers ached.

Roland sighed at the fact that the inexplicable power seemed to only exist in the Dream World as expected. He put the gold royal back to his pocket, slipped on a coat and sat at his desk.

Roland intended to copy out the key knowledge he had reviewed in the Dream World while his memory was still clear. It included

the missing parts from every basic subject, as well as detailed designs for some large industrial equipment.

He had made the best of the last three days in the Dream Word. Selling those goods he stole from the campsite behind the door went quite well. He found a local secondhand goods forum where he posted the armor pictures and claimed that he had a number of imitated medieval crafts to sell at low prices. Before long, some buyers who were attracted by its absurdly low price and exquisite craftwork started to contact him.

In the end, armor, 500 yuan each suit, crossbows and daggers, 100 yuan each, were all sold out. The prices were incredibly low in the eye of others, but since Roland did not pay the cost of these goods, he was not distressed when selling them. However, he did not expect that gold royals would be much more difficult to sell. Even if he kneaded them all into round shape, the bank still would not accept the gold that was not traded in a formal way, whether it was gold bars or gold jewelry.

Roland could not manage to sell them to a gold shop nearby either, where they only accepted the accessories they had sold and the customers also had to pay an additional fee. A salesman was kind enough to give him an address of an old pawnbroker that accepted unidentified gold at half the market price. When thinking that he had only a dozen gold royals with a texture far from solid gold, Roland simply threw them all into his wardrobe.

He might as well move more suits of armor out of the campsite instead of wasting time on selling gold.

Meanwhile, Roland had no idea of where to sell three glittering gemstones. In the end, he just left them unsold.

With money in hand, he immediately swept through the secondhand bookstore near the apartment, buying all the textbooks he had ever read. Those he had not read were completely blank except for the covers. Obviously, the Dream World did not exceed his range of awareness, so it seemed impossible for Anna to cover all fields now.

However, thanks to his wide range of hobbies, he had browsed a large amount of all kinds of knowledge on the internet. And now he could get any detailed answers to any designs that he had ever run through, even something he had only just glimpsed upon.

In addition to those that were essential to quickly boost the technology in City of Neverwinter, Roland also bought two new sets of clothes for Zero, as well as a set of winter camping equipment for himself. As a result, he spent all of the money that he had just earned.

Roland could still remember how shocked Zero was when she received the new clothes. She tried to turn down the offer several times before accepting them, unlike any other girl of her age that should not worry about so many things. Roland learned the reason for her behavior after he asked about it. Strangely, this was the first time for Zero to receive a gift, which was something she dared not crave, as her parents beat her at home.

As the creator of the Dream World, Roland felt a strange sense of guilt.

Roland had been busy until noon when Nightingale quietly showed up in the room.

"Didn't you go down to have breakfast?"

"Yeah," Rowland said without looking up, "please fetch lunch for me. I'll eat it in my bedroom."

"Is that what you've been doing all morning?" Nightingale said as she surprisedly weighed the stack of papers at the desk, "How did you come up with so many ideas in such a short amount of time?"

"They've always been in my mind. I just forgot them temporarily." Roland rotated his wrist. "Take a look. What do you think?"

"Describe the electromagnetic field in... a certain volume... mathematical model using the form of... integral?" Nightingale put her hand to her forehead and said, "Your Majesty, I felt a little dizzy. I'll go and bring your lunch first."

Roland could not help but smirk before saying, "Go then."

"By the way, don't you have to go to the office today?" she turned to look at him and asked when she reached the door.

"Why?"

"Barov has business with you. He said there were two letters for you to read personally."



# Chapter 644: Diplomacy in the New Era

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After lunch, Roland summoned Barov into the bedroom.

Barov, the Director of City Hall, who came to Roland's bedroom for the first time, seemed more cautious than usual but looked very excited.

Seeing his behavior, Roland could not help thinking of a story that a celebrity in history ran out to receive his subjects with his clothes in disarray, which considerably touched the visitors. It felt like his lazy behavior unexpectedly aroused a strong feeling of trust in his Director of City Hall and he had not intended it to.

He had to say that male official had a unique advantage in loyalty. For example, he could talk with him overnight, share one bed with him, and so on. But if it was Edith Kant, those things would be regarded as gossip.

Roland smiled and shook his head, setting aside those distracting thoughts. "How many letters have you received during the time I fought and slipped into a coma in the Northern Region?"

"A total of 16." Barov quickly reported. "Most of them are from lords of various domains asking for trade or visiting, and two confidential letters are from the Eastern Region asking for a peace negotiation. I've answered them all as you've required."

They had concluded the arrangements in a council meeting before the war. When the king led the army and marched on war, Barov would temporarily deal with the administrative affairs of Neverwinter in the king's absence. He would be responsible for reading all letters that were sent to the king. And the letters which were of particular importance and beyond Barov's power to answer would be sent to the battlefield by carrier pigeon.

"Just for a peace negotiation?"

"Yes... They're unwilling to surrender the right of enfeoffment. Moreover, they advise you to keep the tradition and honor of nobility."

"Next spring, those people will naturally know what kind of choice they should make." Roland shrugged. "Where are the letters for my attention? Where are they from?"

"One came from Astrology Association of the city of Dawn, the other from the Kingdom of Dawn," Barov said, handing over two sheets of paper, "They arrived in the moment you were in a deep slumber, and it tells something that is a bit... weird."

"Weird?"

Roland first spread out the parchment with the constellation pattern on it.

It was written by Astrologer of Dispersion Star. He had spent the first half page on greetings and gratitude. The astronomical telescopes Roland had sent to observatory had been put into use. Certainly, they should thank him for that, Roland thought, but the rest of the letter numbed him for a while.

"They've tracked the Star of Extinction in the sky?"

"A star that was sparkling red and was located in a permanent place?"

The first thing that came to Roland's mind was a synchronous orbit.

Judging from his poor knowledge of astronomy, he knew that only objects that traveled on a synchronous orbit could remain relatively still with the planet.

"If Bloody Moon appeared on this orbit, it would definitely influence the planet. Plus the observation also showed that its size should be extremely small."

"So Bloody Moon was not a natural celestial body, but a man-made satellite?"

After thinking for a moment, Roland denied his speculation. "If it was a satellite, how could it be descending to Earth?" According to Agatha's view, the moment Bloody Moon showed up, the entire continent would witness it. It was greater and brighter than the

moon, and its scarlet light dyed the walls of Holy City bloody red. Even on a bright day, one could see its outline.

"It made no sense."

He was silent for a while before putting the letter aside. "Write a letter. Invite the astrologers to come to Neverwinter."

"But they rejected you last time," Barov said with hesitation, "I'm afraid this time..."

"Things have changed. Now that the Astrology Association has found the star they want to pursue, they'll just observe the sky where the star is located," Roland tapped the table and said, "You told them in the letter that Neverwinter has developed a better astronomical telescope and found some ancient books about the Star of Extinction. I believe they'll come."

"Yes."

He spread out the second piece of paper, or a slip of paper as he would call it. As per usual, a message delivered by a carrier pigeon was always very concise.

"The King of Dawn died, and his eldest son Appen Moya succeeded the throne."

"He ordered the elimination of believers of the church, cut off the trade route to the Holy City and has begun to hunt down witches."

"As a result, a rebellion broke out on the border that affected our caravan."

"The original plan may temporarily be suspended."

Roland could not help frowning. He knew that it was normal for Barov, who was unclear about what the church had done to the Kingdom of Dawn, to be confused. After Isabella and others retreated, the King of Dawn would sooner or later die of a lack of pills. He just did not expect that Appen would hate the church so much that he even involved witches.

Of the policies Appen had given, eliminating believers seemed reasonable. But the unilateral ban on trade basically cut off the source of wealth for border lords. The church must be behind the rebellion. Yet, hunting down witches was something that absolutely went against Roland's interests.

An order of such impulsion could not be drawn from the ideas of the three powerful Families. The only possible explanation was that the new king had lost his mind when seeking revenge for his father.

Roland had thought that the Kingdom of Dawn would be a potential ally, but this fact had disappointed him.

"Send a formal diplomatic letter to Appen," Roland said slowly, "First of all, it's to congratulate him for his coronation, and then warn him to stop hunting down witches. A pure witch isn't the

same as a common witch and Graycastle has established a formal witch organization. Anyone who treats them as enemies will be against the Kingdom of Graycastle."

"Uh... Your Majesty." Barov wiped the sweat away from his forehead. "Are you sure you want to put those words in the letter?"

"Are there any questions?"

"He won't take it seriously. He may think you're threatening him."

Roland was very clear that sometimes even the feudatories under the local lords would not follow the king's order, let alone foreign kingdoms. But the era had changed. If the kingdom did not understand diplomacy, he did not mind teaching them what it really was.

"I'm threatening him," he answered nakedly, "If Appen Moya insists on his way, I may as well support a new king of the Kingdom of Dawn next year when we conquer Holy City, a wise king who'll fight with Graycastle against the Battle of Divine Will. Andrea of House Quinn will be a good choice."

Diplomacy in the new era would be built on steel firearms. Anything he failed to earn on the negotiating table would be taken by force. To deal with other kingdoms, intervening in their internal affairs, changing heirs, supporting oppositions, and directly stationing the troops into their lands would be common ways. Roland did not want any other kingdoms to stand in his way

before Bloody Moon came.

Therefore, the core of this diplomatic letter meant to show "Don't say that I didn't warn you."

"I, I got it," Barov Mons answered with a complex look in his eyes. He was astonished, excited, and undisguisedly awed... He bent down deeply and said, "I'll send your will to the Kingdom of Dawn."

# Chapter 645: Farewell and Promise

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Finally, Roland could not stay in his bedroom all day and he had to go to the office.

It was almost dusk when Nightingale informed him that Tilly wanted to meet him.

Roland had to put on a coat, comb his long hair, and take a pile of writing papers to the office. He opened the door and found that Tilly and Ashes were there waiting for him.

Seeing Roland holding heavy stuff, Ashes immediately took the thick stack of papers. This left Roland feeling quite surprised as he never expected that Ashes, who had always been dissatisfied with him, would help him one day.

The sunset pierced through a French window, dying the walls orange-red. At the same time, it also left a ray of gold on them. All of this somewhat gave them a sense of parting.

Roland had already guessed Tilly's intention.

Though Roland did not want them to leave, he knew that this day finally would come. Besides, it was very sincere of them not to leave when he was in a coma.

"I'm here to say goodbye to you," Tilly said calmly, "I have to go back to Sleeping Island to resolve the Bloodfang Association



issues."

Roland stared at Tilly's dainty face and eyes which reflected the sunset. After a while of silence, Roland said, "I see. When does the Charming Beauty arrive in the western region? I'll make a farewell dinner for you. Wait a moment..." He was suddenly stunned and asked, "You mean that you'll come back?"

Ashes could not help but cover her mouth.

Tilly directly chuckled and asked humorously, "Well, won't you welcome me? Brother."

"No, I mean... Why do you..." Roland opened his mouth in surprise but had nothing to say. After a while, he asked, "Is it because of the Months of Demons?"

"Could it not be for something else?" Tilly stretched her hands and said, "Don't you have higher expectations for me?"

He was completely astonished.

"Will you..."

"Yes, what you thought is right." Tilly outspokenly said, "I'll take the news to Sleeping Island that you won the battle against the church. I'll also tell them they needn't live a troubling life and hide on the small island any longer, because the church has completely lost control of City of Neverwinter of Graycastle in the western

region. When you're ready, I shall bring the witches who would like to come to the western region to settle down here. At that time, I hope you won't to complain that they eat too much."

Roland's heart was filled with indescribable excitement as he said, "They're welcome in the western region at any time!"

"But your castle isn't big enough to accommodate so many witches. If only half of them would like to come, the number is still several times bigger than that of the Witch Union. What's more, most of them aren't combat witches. I'm planning to hire ships to deliver them when the Months of Demons are over, for the routes are much safer at that time." Princess Tilly revealed a sly grin.

He promised without any hesitation. "There wouldn't be any problems, for Karl will build enough accommodation before the next spring."

Tilly stretched out three fingers and said, "In addition, I hope that you can promise me three extra conditions, brother."

Tilly was so serious that Roland subconsciously sat upright. "Go ahead."

"Firstly, you can't constrain them if they want to leave City of Neverwinter for other towns."

"No problem," he replied instantly, "but at the moment, the Kingdom of Graycastle isn't unified and I can't guarantee that

people in other domains will treat witches equally. Thus, for the sake of safety, I advise them to just settle in the western region or upon Sleeping Island temporarily. It won't be late for them to leave the western region by the time I'm able to control the entire kingdom."

"It's just a hypothesis." Tilly nodded with satisfaction and continued, "Secondly, you can't force them to work for you if they aren't willing to."

Roland poured two cups of tea for them and said, "Can I allure them to work for me?"

Tilly gave him an affirming look and said, "It's okay if you don't use forcible methods."

"Deal." He could not help smiling.

Since they were busy seeking shelters after basically awakening, it was quite easy for Roland to make those naive little girls plunge themselves into the waves of industrialization. He had a massive rewarding mechanism to absorb them. Except for salaries, it would be attractive enough for them to work for him if he set the rule that only working witches had the rights to enjoy scented soaps, delicious wine, and ice cream.

Capital sugarcoated-bullets were far more compelling than pure violence.

"Lastly, I hope that Sleeping Spell can exist independently." When speaking of this point, Tilly appeared to be somewhat hesitant because she thought that this condition was a little harsh. "Of course, I'll hand over a part of the money earned by Sleeping Spell to City of Neverwinter."

"The Sleeping Spell?" Roland was in a daze. He remembered that this bounty organization was formed to resolve the conflicts between combat witches and assistant witches while making profits for Sleeping Island. In other words, almost all of the witches on the island belonged to the Sleeping Spell. If the organization became independent, it meant that Tilly got the control of all witches in it.

He soon realized why Princess Tilly had been hesitant to say the words. If the Sleeping Spell settled down here as an independently self-administrative organization, it was the Sleeping Spell that would still decide to accept bounty missions or dispatch witches to the Fjords. So what Tilly had asked for looked like she was taking precautions against him.

However, Roland agreed instantly. "Of course it can. Though only if they abide by the internal laws of the western region."

"Isn't the Sleeping Spell like a private company?" Roland thought.

Actually speaking, the minute he realized that the witches on Sleeping Island would settle down here, he had mixed feelings of joys and worries, not knowing whether he should conscript them into the Witch Union or not.

As one of the three major administrative agencies along with City Hall and the First Army, the Witch Union must be controlled by Wendy who was loyal to him, so that he could rest assured. But there were too many witches on Sleeping Island. Once all of them joined the Witch Union, Wendy's control would be abated and it would be less righteous for him to intervene and manage at that time.

But if they did not join the Witch Union, he did not want to seem callous towards those witches. As such, with Tilly's condition, Roland now felt relieved. In addition, it was normal for Tilly to feel a little worried, for trust itself needed time to build. Tilly gave more trust to him than before, which was huge progress.

"Really?" Tilly felt somewhat surprised at his quick answer.

"Don't worry. I always keep my word." Roland smiled.

"Well..." Tilly now felt relaxed, saying, "Then I shall go back to my bedroom to pack my stuff. The Charming Beauty will arrive in three days. Except for the combat witches who followed me, I'll take Iffy and Softfeathers with me. Once the Bloodfang Association issues are resolved, I'll send them back."

"You won't come back until the Months of Demons are over?"

"You've asked me whether it was because of the Months of Demons, and I've also said that I don't deny that." She blinked her eyes.

"That means you'll come back in advance?" Roland asked her closely.

Tilly nodded and said, "Just like last year, brother. I'll fight with you against demonic beasts until the heavy snow stops."

# Chapter 646: Hotpot

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When the two were about to leave, Ashes, who walked behind Princess Tilly, suddenly stopped and turned around to say, "Your Majesty, I owe you an apology."

This was the first time that Ashes had used polite words when talking to Roland. "Well. As for those episodes happening in the palace, I'm very..." Roland explained to Ashes.

Ashes shook her head and said, "We all know that he isn't you. He can neither lead us to defeat the church nor offer enough freedom and trust to us witches. I didn't believe this until you defeated the church and I'm very sorry for that." She paused and continued, "Each witch will remember what you've done, and you're more qualified to be Lady Tilly's brother than him."

If Ashes said such words, these would also be Tilly's thoughts. They did not believe that he was Prince Roland. Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry. Was this some kind of recognition?

Staring at his smiling sister behind Ashes, he abruptly realized something.

The Extraordinary covered her chest with the right hand and slightly bent. Her black ponytail hung down upon her shoulders and her golden eyes were like the shining stars in the evening.

"Envoy Ashes salutes you, Your Majesty."

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Three days later, the farewell dinner which Andrea had long waited for finally arrived.

What she had awaited was not the farewell but the new delicious food His Majesty promised.

Since the last farewell, she had always remembered that there had been more delicious food than just ice cream. So Andrea had expected to taste it this time. But the battle against the church was of great significance and so she was reluctant to suggest it. But now, she could have a taste.

The dinner was not held in the castle but in the expanded castle backyard.

Through a long corridor formed by olives and entering the center of the backyard, Andrea smelled a thick scent before seeing any food. "Was it crystal fish from the Everwinter's glacier? Or was it flavored egg from the Wolfheart's cliff? Or was it the rainbow trout from the Fjords that's known for its delicious taste. No, no, no! I haven't smelled anything that bears a scent so tempting before. No matter how rare the material is, it can't make such delicious food."



"I'm suddenly hungry." Shavi shouted.

"Have you always led such a life in the western region?" Molly licked her lips and said, "What an enviable life!"

Breeze embraced Lotus and Evelyn together and then explained to Molly. "I haven't had many chances to enjoy it. It's them you should envy."

Candle explained. "This kind of dinner isn't held every day and the dessert is only served every three days."

"Only served every three days..." Molly held her forehead and said, "Why do I feel like you're showing off."

"No, I'm not."

Ashes took a glimpse of Andrea, though she could not control her saliva either, she said, "Hey, don't drool out."

If it was at an ordinary time, Andrea would have sneered back, but now her attention was completely drawn to round stumps at the side of the backyard.

They appeared to grow out of the ground at the first sight. The tree trunk was so thick and sturdy that as many as seven or eight people could encircle it. The hot air coming out its inside made it look like something was burning.

When she walked closer, she found that the tree trunk had been hollowed out. A huge iron pot was erected on top of the stumps and the thick scent was coming out from it was soup.

In addition, there were various different foods on the short table beside the trunk. They were various but common at the dining table. What made her more confused was that the food was raw.

This was the first time that Andrea had seen such a kind of dinner. There were no attendants, no white cloth, no music and no crowds of people. Each one sat around the stumps in a circle. It looked like that they had to do it by themselves.

What Andrea thought was true. After all of the witches arrived, Roland clapped his hands to indicate that the dinner had begun. He explained to all of the witches, "This is a hotpot dinner. It's very easy to eat, simply put all the food you like into the pot and enjoy it when it's cooked."

Fall was the best season to enjoy hotpots. As a very popular cooking method, it was quite easy to make a hotpot. Even the simplest vegetables could take delicious. The most important thing was that hotpots were very down-to-earth. Eaters would gather together to enjoy fine food from the same pot. Therefore, they were much easier to promote relationships among people than traditional banquets. As a farewell dinner, hotpots could reduce people's sadness and depression.

A hotpot's essence lay in its soup stock. In this age, cooking

methods were largely monotonous. Usually, one ingredient had only one taste and people had to pay more attention to the quality of materials themselves. Roland had ordered chefs to mix various ingredients that had distinguished flavors and put them in a pot before to cook them. They included whole chickens, porcine bones, bird beak Mushrooms, seafood, spice and so on. So the soup stock was very rich in taste, a taste that could not be made by only cooking one or two raw materials.

It was Leaf who made the hotpot table that had a style of nature. She had cast the power of Heart of Forest to make the plants grow quickly. At her will, they had become what Roland had asked for without any extra transformations. They were covered inside with a thermal insulation coating. Even if the spirit lamps were lit, they would not set the tables on fire. Instead, the temperature of the inner walls would spread gradually over to the entire stumps. If they put their hands on a tabletop, they would feel a lukewarm heat.

As Andrea put some cooked meat into her mouth, she could not help but hum because of the strong and rich flavor.

As tens of delicious food materials assailed her tongue and the hot soup flowed down her throat into her stomach, Andrea could not stop eating, though this feeling was totally different from ice cream bread.

According to the table manner of the nobles, they should not take new food until they had finished the food upon their plates. However, they could not keep that manner with the hotpots created by His Majesty, otherwise, they would have nothing left

after finishing their food.

The other witches on the table were no longer elegant. In other words, a hotpot had nothing to do with elegance. There were even several plates of delicious food in front of Lady Tilly. Even Ashes had picked up food several times from the plates in front of her.

Ashes imitated Andrea's tone and said, "'The essence of food lies in its original flavor. Without seasoning, the boiled soup can be closer to the original flavor.' Who has said these words? In my memories, someone considered salt and spices a barbaric way of cooking and said that real nobles will never use them to cook, but today, what I've seen is different from what she said."

If it was before, Andrea might argue with her. But now, she had realized what was the most important thing.

It was more important to enjoy the hotpot than play words with Ashes.

She lightly glimpsed at Ashes. Without hesitation, she pushed Ashes' spoon away and scooped a piece of floating meat into her bowl.

This time, Andrea ate contently.

# Chapter 647: A Confession

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Roland spent all his time copying the textbooks after Tilly bid her farewell.

He first started with the basic courses. As he had just got a chance to revisit the knowledge long forgotten, naturally, he needed to take the advantage of it and add the missing information to the textbooks previously drafted based purely on his memory.

Second, he had to improve the designs of the current equipment used in the city of Neverwinter. Roland knew there was still a big difference between an acceptable machine and a good one. A more comprehensive design could further enhance the productivity and efficiency of steam engines and machine tools.

Based on the new design, Anna had finally completed the first steam turbine.

Roland hurried to the backyard of North Slope soon after he heard the news. He and Anna both sat on the workstation, appreciating the charm of this colossal apparatus. At this moment, Roland felt his relationship with Anna was totally different from the ones he used to have with other girls in the modern world.

The machine was nearly six meters long and was connected to an external preheating boiler and a steam boiler. In main it looked like a huge metal roller tightly wrapped around by dense impellers. As its spindle was driven by high-pressure steam when the machine was heated by coal, the new turbine was much more

efficient than old reciprocating steam engines, and it also produced far fewer noises and vibrations.

As a power source of a new generation, the first model of the machine turbine would be used to help with Thunder's naval exploration.

Unfortunately, in spite of its versatility, Roland did not plan to build a second turbine for the time being. For one thing, the plant did not have the capability to manufacture a similar one within a short period of time yet. For another, Anna would soon need to focus on improving machine tools.

"How do you like it?" Anna turned around and nuzzled up to Roland. "I'm good, aren't I?"

Unlike most girls, Anna could not be happier whenever she turned a paper design into a physical reality. Every time she completed a major project, she would not conceal her delight and satisfaction.

Roland could tell that Anna was contented with the life she had now.

"Of course you are, but I'm just a tad better than you." Roland wiped off the dirt on her cheeks with a smile, leaving a hint of gray streaks on her face.

Every time he gazed into her clear blue eyes, he swallowed back

the words he had prepared to say, the words that he had promised Nightingale to convey to Anna. Although Roland had resolved to make his confession, he did not realize how hard it actually was until he really tried to do so.

No justifications could lift the burden off his shoulders.

For the past few days, he had occupied himself by preparing books and drafting designs to temporarily forget about the possible consequences of this inevitable talk.

However, his indecision was also hurting the people he cared for, especially Nightingale who had been eager for an answer.

Roland knew he could not keep dawdling like this.

When the boilers gradually cooled down and the steam turbine eventually came to a halt, Roland took a deep breath and whispered in Anna's ear. "Come to my bedroom tonight. We need to talk."

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Roland sat in front of his desk after night descended. He could hear his heart throbbing frantically in his chest.

[Nobody in this era cares about how many women a noble owns as they do in the modern world.]

[I'm just following my heart.]

[Nobody will think it's something that breaks a social norm.]

Roland revolved rapidly a multitude of reasons in his mind but turned them down one by one. He felt two voices in his head debating and wrestling with each other. He wanted to add the last missing part to the book, only to find his quill suspending in the air, not a single word written down.

His anguish ended when Anna pushed the door open.

The heated argument in his head instantly stopped. Roland put down the quill and fixed his eyes on the girl.

Anna looked nothing unusual. She was cloaked in an over-sized pajama. A strand of damp fringes was clinging to her forehead. A faint, placid smile was lingering in her eyes, and she looked as serene as ever.

Roland somehow remembered that after the Months of Demons of the first year, Anna had voluntarily waited for him at the stairs.

She never whined or complained, but simply told him her thoughts and what she wanted explicitly.

Now it was his turn.



Roland pulled her to the desk and slowly confessed what had bothered him all this time.

An ensuing silence fell between them. The silence was so long that Roland thought Anna would turn away abruptly and leave the room. To his surprise, however, he did not perceive a noticeable change in her expression when he slowly looked up at her.

"That's it?"

Roland failed to come up with an answer promptly. "What?"

"I've been wondering when you'll tell me this." Anna seated herself next to him. "I don't want you to spit it out that fast, but at the same time, I wish you could talk to me as soon as you can... Now I finally don't need to worry about this matter anymore."

Roland gaped. "You've known it from the beginning..."

Anna replied bluntly, "I can tell that you have feelings for Nightingale. The more hesitant you seem to be, the more it shows that you care about me. But I also hope you can open up to me earlier because I would like to share your burden no matter what it is."

Anna let out a sigh at these words. "I never dreamed that I would win a royal family member's affections. I thought I would be very contented to just be with you. After you told me that you would

one day marry me, I changed my mind—Roland, I won't share you with anybody."

"I'm sorry. I..."

"You don't need to apologize, for love knows no right or wrong. Plus... I feel glad that you've picked this moment to confess to me." Anna paused for a second and then said, "You aren't a man from this world, are you?"

Roland's heart stopped with a queer jerk.

"Nobody, whether he's a noble or a civilian, will ever feel hesitant or restless because of this kind of problem, unless he was brought up in a completely different world." Anna continued, "Likewise, people in this world may treat a witch fairly, but they'll never befriend her. Do you remember our bet? In the book, I wrote that you were a guest from another world, a world that wasn't hell or an abyss, but a more pleasant place. You brought knowledge we've never heard of. It was God that sent you to me."

At this point, Roland realized there was no need for him to continue to conceal his identity. He replied, "You're... overall right, except some little details."

Anna giggled. "I also wrote that you would tell me about Nightingale in the book. It appears I've got at least two things right."

Roland suddenly found Anna was not only good at learning. She also had terrifying perspicacity.

Before Roland could make a reply, Anna had taken his hand. She pronounced her words slowly but decisively. "I can't give my consent to your request, at least not now."

Roland was dumbfounded. What did she mean...by not now? Did Anna imply that she would agree someday later?

"I know what's bothering you. Don't worry. I'll talk her through. It's time to sleep." Anna pressed her kiss to Roland's forehead and said, "Goodnight, Your Majesty."

With a creak, the door was closed. The room became quiet and tranquil again. It took Roland quite a while to fully recover from the shock he had gone through after Anna left.

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# Chapter 648: Otto's Request

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The king's city of the Kingdom of Dawn was currently undergoing extreme political turbulence. Even Yorko, who did not normally partake in politics, could easily perceive the underlying tension.

Since the new king ascended the throne, residences had been constantly broken in and searched by soldiers. Rumors about rebellions of lords at the border remained afloat in taverns. Foreign commodities on the exhibition had largely reduced, and even Yorko's caravan had suspended the slave trades.

According to Hill, Appen Moya had not only taken in slaves from the Kingdom of Wolfheart but had also liberated them from slavery. It was a good deed, but unfortunately, the act impeded Roland's plan.

Yorko did not worry the slightest about the interruption of the business, for he did not see any potential losses from it. The caravan was provided by Denise, and there was no overhead cost of trading in slaves. He did not really care about that little money he had earned from the trading. As long as he was still the ambassador of the Kingdom of the Graycastle, sooner or later he would find the other profitable business opportunities.

On the other hand, there had been some progress in the formation of the alliance.

Three days after the coronation of Appen, Yorko was summoned

to the palace and was inquired about the details of the alliance agreement by the new king. After Appen learned that the church had suffered a serious defeat at Coldwind Ridge, he delightedly put his fingerprint on the agreement.

Yoriko was pleased that after numerous restless nights, the first task His Majesty had assigned to him had, at length, officially come to end.

His good mood, however, did not last long. All his self-complacency was blown away that very night by an airy comment of Hill's.

"It was too late. I'm afraid this alliance has lost its due efficacy," his guard said. "Besides, His Majesty may not like the way the new king treats witches. Timothy, who carried the same hostile attitude, was the best example. You may keep the parchment for yourself as a souvenir."

It was a well-known fact that Roland Wimbledon liked witches. However, Yoriko did not think Roland would be that defiant and stupid as to break the deal with the neighbor because of them.

Even if His Majesty dreaded the attitude of the King of Dawn toward witches, he could do nothing about it. After all, the Moyas had been reigning over the Kingdom of Dawn for generations, and Appen, as the ruler of the country, could manage his realm however he liked. Nobody could ever interfere in their domestic affairs.

Having said that, Yorko still sided with his old friend. He wondered as pretty and remarkable as witches were, how they could possibly be demons' minions.

Yorko swayed his head, trying to shake off these trifles that had been bothering him. He was merely an ambassador, whose sole duty was to take messages for His Majesty. As to political commotions and changes in the situation, they had nothing to do with him.

As he still got some time, Yorko planned to first meet Denise and then decide his leisure activities tonight.

He was just about to set out when the eldest son of the Luoxi Family suddenly pounded the door.

Yorko regarded this unexpected visit as evil forebodings. This man had never brought any good news to him. Otto had earlier claimed that the information he carried could determine whether the Kingdom of Graycastle would preserve or devastate. Later, he had whined about the disastrous change in the new king's character. Every piece of news he had brought had delivered Yorko a headache. If Hill had not insisted on keeping in touch with Otto Luoxi, Yorko would have simply chosen to ignore his presence.

He sent for Hill at once and ushered Otto into the living room.

"You've got news from the palace for His Majesty again?"

"No, not for now." Otto poured himself some tea as a matter of course and asked, "You've got plans tonight?"

"Yes." Yorko lied. He hoped Otto would back off. Denise would bestow him a romantic evening, whereas Otto would only give him a fitful night.

"Put it off then. I want to ask you a favor." Otto handed him a black envelope.

Yorko opened it and found an invitation card with a seal of a pitch-black dragon head on it, one identical to the pattern on a gold royal.

After reading the letter, Yorko shook his head. "You want me to go to the exhibition with you? I don't have money to help you bid."

In fact, Denise had taken him to this kind of exhibition a few times. The commodities were indeed of extreme rarity, but their prices were also astonishingly high. A bid of 1,000 gold royals was fairly common in an auction. Yorko wondered where these wealthy merchants had collected all their money from.

Otto drained the teacup. "You don't need to worry about money. By helping me, you're actually helping your king."

"Tell me about it." Hill, who seated himself next to Yorko, put in.

Otto answered in a low voice, "I've heard that there'll be a witch

for sale in this auction."

"Hell." Yorko cursed within himself. He knew it was not going to be good news. Everybody knew that the new king was now hunting down witches. If it was at a normal time, he would definitely tag along with pleasure. At present, however, he would rather stay away from witches. "Aren't these people worried that they would infuriate King Appen Moya?"

Yorko left the rest of his words unsaid. "The three families shall unite together and fully support the king. It appears that you oppose his order."

"Although City of Glow was the Moyas' domain, there are still some places his arm can't reach." Otto shrugged.

"Is the exhibition hosted by Rats?"

"They won't be Rats if they're financially capable of hosting this auction," Hill replied nonchalantly.

"You're correct." Otto gave an approving nod. "The exhibition isn't that formal but is still organized by some of the most powerful local merchants. They call them the Black Money. These people often conduct underground businesses, a big part of which is slave trading."

Yorko asked, "There's a slave market right in the outer city. Why do they have to go underground?"



"You'll know when you get there."

"Can the Paytons join us?" Yorko's interest was now aroused, but he did not want to blindly follow Otto's instructions.

"Are you talking about the businesswoman you usually hang out with? No, she can't," Otto said flatly. "The Black Money has the strictest selection of their guests. She's a relatively reputable merchant, but she isn't well-known enough to be eligible for the exhibition."

"Do you want to buy the witch?" Hill turned the subject.

"Not me, but Mr. Ambassador does." Otto pointed to Yorko. "The Luoxi Family is too close to the royal family. It'll attract unwelcome attention if I bid on her. However, it's quite understandable that the Ambassador of the Graycastle wishes to take a witch as his bed wench. I'll take care of the payment. I hope you can transport her to His Majesty Roland's domain via the trade route you've opened before. Nobody will raise suspicions if she's hidden among the delegation."

"But the slave trade has suspended." Hill spread out his hands. "We don't know when the business will restore."

"You can hide the witch in your fleet among other cargos."

"Why do you want to do that?"

"Because of... an old friend." Otto hesitated for a moment. "She's a witch. I thought she fell off the cliff and died, but I later met her in the Western Region of the Kingdom of Graycastle. His Majesty Roland Wimbledon once told me that every witch was precious and that they shouldn't die because of the church's malicious slander and false accusations. I also want her to have some companions."

"Well, with respect to this matter, I need to..." While Yorko was still rummaging for excuses to decline the request, Hill Fawkes grasped Otto's hand.

"I see. Leave it to Mr. Ambassador."

# Chapter 649: [Black Money]

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"Thank you. I'll call on you again tonight."

Yoriko's jaw dropped. His eyes flitted across the two people in dismay. It appeared something was wrong here. They had just ignored him, who was the real Ambassador of Graycastle!

After Otto took his leave, Yoriko could not wait to start his questioning. All his complaining, however, caught in his throat when Hill said, "This is also what His Majesty wants."

Yoriko put his hand on his forehead. "Are you sure? I represent the Kingdom of Graycastle. If the King of Dawn knows I'm transporting a witch, the relations between the two nations will again deteriorate and all the work we've done will be in vain. What should we do then?"

"Appen Moya won't focus on these trivial matters. Even if he does notice it, witches are far more important than the alliance." Hill affirmed. "As a matter of fact, my men have already checked whether there were witches hidden among refugees when they did the screening."

"And?"

"None." Hill shook his head. "There are two possibilities. One is that there are no witches among refugees at all. The other is that they disguise themselves pretty well and have completely blended in. Anyway, if you can bring a witch to His Majesty, he will surely

shower you with rewards. You know how much His Majesty treasure them."

Aware that it was his old friend's request, Yorko had no choice but to acquiesce sullenly.

He tried to sooth his resentment by convincing himself that the exhibition was just another way of exploring this country. Yorko was indeed curious about what kind of slaves would be sold on an exhibition that even Denise was not eligible to attend.

Otto arrived at the entrance of the mansion punctually in the evening.

Yorko climbed into a splendid coach bearing no emblem. Furnished with thick fur rug, the wagon was also equipped with two chains hanging down from the ceiling. Yorko did not need to ask what they were for.

"I didn't expect you have such a peculiar taste." Yorko whistled.

Otto blushed. "Ahem... it isn't my wagon. This kind of carriage comes in handy when you need to lock someone up while at the same time avoiding curious eyes."

"You don't have to explain. I understand." Yorko stroked the cuffs at the end of the chains and asked, "Can I borrow the wagon for a few days after the business is over?"

"Naturally. 50 silver royals per day and the lease includes the service of a coachman." Otto picked a comfortable spot and lay down after telling the coachman their destination. "It'll take a while. You may take a rest here."

"How long?"

"Around an hour. It's in the suburb of City of Glow."

Yorko gasped. "Then we won't be able to return to the king's city tonight! After the sun sets, the city gate will be closed, won't it?"

"'Black Money' will provide accommodations and food. In fact, they'll provide everything you can get from the city of Glow."

"Sounds like a marketplace."

"Pretty much. The only difference is it's underground." Otto explained, "I went but once, so I don't know if there have been any changes in the procedure of the auction. But I think there shouldn't be a problem as long as you follow the guide. After you win the bid, you don't need to wait until the auction ends but just directly take the witch from the backstage. A servant will lead you to your room..."

"Hang on..." Yorko stared at Otto in surprise. "Aren't you coming with me?"

"There's only one invitation card."

"What about the payment?"

Otto smiled. "The black letter represents money. It's a pass issued by the Chamber of Commerce. With the letter, you can directly place your bid."

"Without a limit?" Yorko's eye bulged.

"Of course there is... but it's way higher than what the cost of a witch is supposed to be. As far as my knowledge goes, it cost about 1,000 gold royals to purchase a witch several years ago. As King Appen has ordered to eradicate witches, the current final bidding price should be a little lower."

"1,000 gold royals!" Yorko smacked his lips. "Those upper nobles just like throwing their money away, don't they?" Yorko knew even all the brothels in the king's city altogether would not cost that much! Could he be too outdated to understand what real extravagance was?

"Also... in order to win her trust, you'd better not touch her." Otto coughed. "She isn't a real slave after all, otherwise it'll cause unwanted trouble on the way."

"I certainly comprehend." Yorko breathed out a sigh. She's His Majesty's woman, whom he would not have the guts to lay a single finger upon.

"In any event, put a mask on her when you get out. I'll meet you tomorrow."

The carriage conveyed them to the west after it passed through the city gate. It did not slow down until darkness closed in and swallowed the last drop of the sun rays. Like Otto had said, they arrived at the destination in an hour.

The venue of the exhibition looked no different from any other ordinary residences at the first glance. There was an empty yard lined with jagged fences, at the center of which stood a house made of mud and straw. Behind the yard lay bare farmlands where wheat had been harvested. The fields were dappled with piles of wheat-straw that looked like lumps of bumps bulging from the ground.

The only thing that stood out was numerous torches on the farmlands, a sign that indicated somebody was guarding this place.

Normally, nobody would guard the yard of a civilian's residence.

After the guard checked the invitation card, Otto and his men all remained in the yard, whereas Yorko entered the mud house with a guide. After going down a wooden staircase and passing through a man-made narrow tunnel, he found himself in a natural limestone cave.

The cave was about half the size of the square in the king's city. By the flickering torchlight, Yorko could see numberless small caves on either side, all pitch-dark, leading to somewhere only

Gods knew.

The ground at the bottom of the cave had been polished and tiled. It was so lavishly furnished that only the stalactites overhung above his head showed what kind of place it originally was. The hall had been crowded with people waiting for the commencement of the exhibition.

Yorko now understood what Otto meant by "not that formal". Based on what he saw, the assembling was quite similar to one of the Rats' meeting.

"Sir, this way." The guide ushered him to the seat marked on the black letter and sat next to him. "I'll be at your service during the whole exhibition. Please feel free to ask me if you have any questions regarding our products." With these words, the guide placed Yorko's arm on her soft bosom. In the dismal light, Yorko could see a pointy chin and plumped lips underneath the mask.

"Is this also a part of your service?" Yorko fumbled her breasts as a matter of course. "What's your name?"

"Of course, sir. You can call me No. 76." Her breath was heavy with fragrance, but her reply was not breathless in the least.

Yorko had to admit his previous assumption had been wrong. Rats could never hire such well-trained servant girls. If every attendant was accompanied by such a guide, the cost just for hiring these girls would be tremendous.



"Is it always so dark here?" Yorko stroked the soft arm while raising his eyebrows. "I can't see the products on the stage clearly with this poor lighting."

"You'll see soon." The girl chuckled.

No. 76's words were soon verified by the metal scraping sound from above. In a second, several iron cables were dropped off the ceiling, each of which was attached to a weird stone at the end. The glow emanated from those stones was several times brighter than that the torchlight. All of sudden, Yorko could see the stage at the front perfectly.

The murmuring across the cave instantly died away.

The torchlight appeared to be even fainter compared with the soft, bright illumination of the stones. The whole cave had slipped into darkness, except the stage, upon which everybody rested their eyes.

A man in a tuxedo walked on the stage and bowed to the audience.

"Thank you for waiting. Now I announce that the 'Black Money' exhibition officially begins!"

# Chapter 650: A Special Slave

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"What's that?" Yorko stared at the illuminating object in surprise despite its dazzling light. "Is it also something you sell in the exhibition?"

"It has several names. For example, Sun Stone and Light Crystal... but we prefer to call it Magic Stone because it's said the stone comes from demons' lair." No. 76 explained in a low voice. "'Black Money' once sold them in an auction, and the final bidding price was around 2,000 to 3,000 gold royals. They're expensive and rare, so they won't be sold in every exhibition. At least, it's not included in the list of products for sale tonight." She paused for a second and asked, "Sir, is this your first time to come here?"

"Well... sort of." Yorko stroked his nose to conceal his uneasiness. If one stone cost that much, then all the magic stones used for illumination on the stage would be worth more than 10,000 gold royals. This was just such a lavish exhibition!

The guide seemed to perceive Yorko's uneasiness. She drew close to him and whispered in his ear like a perfect lover. "That's nothing, Sir. Every guest who attends the exhibition for the first time is shocked by the magic stones. This is also a means through which 'Black Money' showcases their power."

"You're also one of their means, aren't you?" Yorko had probably not presented himself in such a sumptuous exhibition as much as those great nobles had, but he knew how to talk to women. As his discomfort gradually faded away with the soft whisper of the guide, Yorko wrapped his arms around the girl's waist and drew

her to his chest.

"Not until I get your approval."

"You've got my approval already. Well, after the exhibition..."

"I'll still be at your service, sir." She gently nodded.

Yoriko started to slowly like this place.

By the time his eyes were back to the stage, he had missed two rounds of the auction. The products for sale were apparently not that appealing to the audience, for few people showed interest in them.

Just like the exhibitions he had attended with Denise, the first few rounds were nothing but the less savory aspect of the auction. The main course usually came at a later phase.

Otto reckoned the sale of the witch should not be too close to the end and estimated that the final bidding price would be no more than 700 to 800 gold royals. These merchants sought more thrills and stimulation than pure beauties.

The audience finally stirred a little bit when the first person up for auction was pushed to the stage.

It was a young woman, pretty plain overall except for her fair

skin.

Yorko noticed the girl, unlike slaves sold in the slave market who were usually stark naked, were glamorously dressed in expensive garments only nobles could afford. In other words, she looked exactly like a highborn lady.

"What's that about?" Yorko pinched the waist of No. 76. "To dress up a slave as a noble so that you can sell her at a higher price?"

The guide corrected him with a smile. "Not a slave masquerading as a noble, but a noble slave."

"What's the difference... Hold on." Yorko's eyes widened. "What did you say?"

"She's a true noble." No. 76 gestured Yorko to tone down his voice. "Not a remote relative or a branch, but a noble lineage, the legal heir of a big family."

"Gentlemen, do you see this lady here?" The host announced in a loud voice. "Aphnie Tanfek, the daughter of the Earl of Rubble Woods from the Kingdom of Wolfheart. Since her father was unfortunately killed in the battle against the church, she's now legally the new Earl of Rubble Woods. The Tanfeks is a prominent family that can be dated back to 300 years ago. However, compared with their family history, I believe everybody is more impressed with the jade incident 20 years ago. This is a good chance to retaliate! The starting price is 300 gold royals. Please feel free to place your bid!"

"310!" Someone shouted immediately.

"350 gold royals!"

"400!"

"You're... crazy!" As the bid went higher, Yorko commented in disbelief. "To sell a real noble as a slave? It's a capital offense no country will tolerate!"

There was an unwritten rule among nobles, which was to place noble blood above everything. Anyone who posed a threat to that rule would be considered as a mutual enemy of all aristocracies. That was also why ransom was commonly paid for the exchange of nobles in the event of defeat. As long as their bloodlines still existed, the family would eventually rise to power again. The rule had remained unchanged for several hundred years, and it held true especially for royal families.

This auction, nonetheless, was an open confrontation with the entire aristocratic class.

No. 76 spread out her hands. "It'll be fine if you don't advertise it. Nobody will attribute the end of the noble bloodline to 'Black Money', for the church was the real culprit."

"How will these nobles end up? The host just said 'retaliate', right?"

The guide burst into laughter. "The Tanfeks tried to lower the price of jades with some evil intentions 20 years ago. Many jade traders suffered a lot back then. So their retaliation will be... certainly cruel. But these nobles lost their chance to stage a comeback from the beginning, just like witches."

The next few products were all nobles from the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart, men and women. The male nobles had a wider age range and were more popular than the female ones.

Compared with the heirs, the women merchants perhaps preferred nobles who experienced in managing the operation of the family more.

Yorko now understood why Otto had said the auction had to be underground. He also came to know the reason for their strict selection criteria. Apart from wealth and backgrounds, "Black Money" probably also attached great importance to whether a guest had a genuine intention to make a purchase. In other words, they would only accept people who were their potential buyers, people who were in the same boat.

The witch Yorko intended to bid was the 10th product.

It was undeniable that although in tight bondage, the witch was considerably more beautiful than any of the noble ladies previously presented. Her disheveled brunette hair tumbled unbound down her shoulders. Underneath the thin burlap

garment, a few whip marks could be detected on her bare hands and feet. Evidently, she had been tortured a great deal since being caught. Despite her emaciated frame, she had enchanted facial features and possessed an ineffable charm.

The host exclaimed. "A nameless refugee witch from the Kingdom of Wolfheart. She can heal herself with demons' power. Thanks to the report of our kind citizens, we've got a real piece of treasure here. Think about it, a witch who can heal by herself. You can use her in any way you like! If you dread petting her, 'Black Money' can help you with that as well. Start from 500 gold royals. Please feel free to bid!"

"510."

"560."

"600."

Yorko did not place his bid immediately, for he knew he had to wait until the end when the biddings started to slow down. Only in this way could he possibly win the big ticket.

To his surprise, however, the bidding price soon exceeded 800 gold royals that Otto had formerly estimated. Presently, it went over 1,000. The bidding continued and there was no sign that it would stop anytime soon.

Yorko felt his palm started to sweat.

# Chapter 651: The Auction

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Perhaps that was the witch's ability.

Yorko realized that the eldest son of Luoxi family had only heard that a witch would be auctioned, but he had neglected her ability. A dangerous and eccentric ability would obviously reduce a witch's value, as no one wanted to be killed. Whether witches were affiliated with demons or not, they were not commoners and it was very hazardous to buy them off.

But the ability of this witch sounded not formidable. Self-cure was not able to hurt people, instead, it met some curious people's needs, so the price would be unexpectedly high.

"Sir, don't you want to bid a price?" No.76 firstly took the initiative to ask.

"Uhm... wait a moment." Yorko wiped the sweat from his hands, thinking, "Otto said that the Black Letter was money, but how much is it worth? 1,000 or 2,000 gold royals? If the witch's price turns out to be much higher than his Black Letter's worth, will the Black Money admit the deal? What if they ask me to pay the extra money?" A series of questions occurred to him and made him feel extremely anxious. He did not have even 100 gold royals, let alone 1,000 ones.

At this time, the bidding competition started to slow down. Each rise would be kept about 10 gold royals and intervals became longer and longer.



"1,260 gold royals!"

"Is there a higher bidding?"

Yorko knew that he would lose the witch if he kept silent.

He gritted his teeth, thinking, "If the Black Letter was maxed out, I'll show the Black Money my identity as the Ambassador of Graycastle. They won't dare to hurt a country's messenger. After that, I'll let Otto pay the extra money tomorrow morning."

"Bid, 1,500 gold royals," he said with a deep voice.

"Yes," No.76 raised her right hand instantly and said, "1,500!"

Hearing that, all the guests began to stir.

The significant rise of nearly 300 showed the buyer's resolution to get the witch. Besides, it also gave implications to other bidders that they need not bid anymore. Since only the wealthiest and most powerful people could get the invitations of the Black Money, it was much more important for the bidders to keep a good relationship than to bid a replaceable entertainment commodity. Under such circumstances, the other bidders usually would stop bidding.

He hoped that he could utilize this bidding technique he had

learned from Denise to make other bidders stop competing with him.

However, he did not get what he wanted.

"1,800!"

A new bidding voice came out of the crowds instantly.

His heart abruptly sank.

The same jump bidding trick meant that the bidder was also as determined as him to buy the witch.

"Sir?" No.76 asked.

"2,000." Yorko tightly clenched his teeth.

After his guide said the price, the other bidder continued to raise his bidding price, saying, "2,300!"

Damn it! This price was crazy even for a witch with self-cure ability. In the slave market, a top female slave with good looks and excellent skills was less than 100 gold royals. With that much money, one can get a dozen of them, with worrying about violating the laws of the Kingdom of Dawn. Isn't that better than buying a witch?

With these thoughts in mind, he turned to look, and to his surprise, he noticed that the guide who had spoken for the other bidder was a male.

"A guide is decided by the bidder's gender, right? So the other bidder is a lady? Why does she want to buy a witch, just for watching?" Yorko indignantly asked No.76.

"What you've said about the choice of a guide is true, unless the guest has special needs," No.76 nodded and then asked, "Do you want to raise your bidding price again?"

"You raise 200 gold royals each time until she gives up."

Yorko decided to buy the witch at all costs. He did not believe that the other bidder was richer than the three families of the Kingdom of Dawn. After all, this was what Otto had asked him to do. If there were any trouble, Otto would take care of it.

As they were competing, the other guest whispered to each other, showing great interests in this scene.

When the bidding price amounted to 4,000 gold royals, the other bidder finally stopped bidding.

But the price was five times higher than that expected by Otto.

"4,000, the first time!"

"The second time!"

The host said steadily and slowly, which made Yorko even more anxious. He felt a desperate urge to replace the host to strike the small hammer that was used to decide the price.

Luckily, the nightmare-like bidding voice never sounded again.

"The third time and it's a deal."

Yorko took a deep breath and leaned on the bench, feeling his back soaked with sweat.

"4,000 gold royals...This witch costs a fortune that I can't make in my whole life. This is how the great nobles spend their money?" At this thought, he suddenly felt that his licentious life back in the king's city of Graycastle was nothing but a joke.

His guide smilingly said, "Sir, congratulations! No.10 commodity is yours now!"

People sitting around him all looked at him with respect, as he had just spent 4,000 gold royals on a short-term consumable commodity.

In the Kingdom of Dawn, wealth stood for identity.

Regardless of the anxieties and concerns during the auction, Yorko was very pleased to undergo this wonderful experience, because, for the first time, people fixed their eyes on him out of respect instead of contempt.

Yorko enjoyed this feeling for a long while and asked, "Are the following commodities all slaves?"

"Yes, except the last one. It's said to be a very rare thing that costs the Black Money lots of efforts to get," No.76 replied.

"You don't know what it is, either."

"Yes, my boss wanted to emphasize its mystic quality by doing so. He only told us that it's an ancient relic embedded with magic stones," she replied.

"So it can shine? You've told me that there aren't any magic stone to be auctioned," Yorko twitched his lip and said.

No.76 explained. "There's not only one kind of magic stones. Some stones can't shine, but they're the best-quality jewelry, such as the Blue Star sold out at the price of 3,400 gold royals six months ago. It was a magic stone that can't shine, but in the dark, you can see numerous shining stars inside it. It was much more precious than common gemstones."

"And it's far more expensive than common ones. What a beautiful magic stone could it be, as it's sold out at such a high

price?" Yorko thought and could not help feeling curious. Now that he had finished what Otto had asked him to do, he planned to leave the rest of the time here to the eye-opening commodities which he could brag about to Denise.

However, seeing the last item on the auction, he felt quite disappointed.

It was a sword.

Four colorful gemstones were inlaid in the handle. He wondered whether the host was going to introduce it as a piece of jewelry or a weapon.

The host started to brag about it. He claimed that it had been found in an ancient monument located in the Impassable Mountain Range. Based on the wall paintings around the place where it had been found, the sword had belonged to an excellent warrior. She had been able to use it to change astronomical phenomena, and her enemies had been demons from the hell. Yorko laughed at these ridiculous words. "It would be more practical to sell those four gemstones alone. The host should not advertise the sword other than gemstones."

The sword was auctioned with a starting price of 50,000 gold royals, which made all the guest burst into an uproar. As a result, no one wanted to bid and this round of auction ended in a haste.

"Where's the witch I've bought?" Yorko shifted his attention from the auction into the witch. He touched the thigh of No.76 and

asked, "Has she been put in my room?"

"Of course, Sir." No.76 chuckled. "The Black Money has arranged everything for you, so this way please."

# Chapter 652: The Witch and Accident

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When they were leaving the dark limestone cave, the guide held Yorko's hand and they walked straight into the cave with ease.

Yorko could hardly see the ground, but the guide did not even slow down. Moreover, he could feel that No. 76 was no weaker than himself. The bumpy calluses on her palm totally did not match her slender body. Other than serving the guests, she was probably also be treated as a guard for the underground exhibition. It would be nice if such a person could be purchased from "Black Money" as cultivating one was not easy.

Although Hill Fawkes looked smart, he definitely would not follow him forever as he was still the man of his old friend. Not to mention that it would be a little... boring for a man to be his guard. It would be more appropriate to replace the man with No. 76.

Of course, Yorko was simply thinking about it. After all, the Black Letter did not belong to him and 4,000 gold royals were far more than Otto's budget. Spending an additional amount of money privately would probably cause a fall-out with the Luoxi family, which was one of the three families.

After entering the cave, Yorko realized that most of the channels were naturally formed and the light of the torch seemed brighter due to the narrow terrain. Moreover, the dark sky could be faintly seen through many of the shafts at the top of the cave. The crisscrossing paths led into the deeper limestone caves where some were already transformed into hotels, while others were hung with barrel signs, just like an underground town.



It seemed necessary to arrange a guide for each customer or it would be very time-consuming to even look for a room.

"By the way, how do I pay for this auction?" Yorko softly asked while there was no one else around.

"You can simply pass the invitation letter to me before you leave the underground, after you confirm the goods are fine," No. 76 said with a smile, "I'll complete the rest of the procedures for you. You can also visit our pub, casino and hot tub. 'Black Money' provides any services, both for fun and relaxation."

"Is all the money written down in the Black Letter?"

"Yes."

"What if someone wants to buy the guide?"

"You just need to pay 500 gold royals to 'Black Money'," No. 76 smoothly answered as if she was accustomed to such questions and asked, "Sir, do you want to buy me?"

"Getting along is not about how long we've spent together, but how much fun we've got," Yorko avoided the question and said, "what do you think?"

"You're right." She chuckled.

"Anyway, may I see what you look like?"

"No way," No. 76 shook her head and said, "Unless you buy the guide, the guide isn't allowed to privately take off their mask. It's the rule of 'Black Money'."

"But you mentioned that you can provide any services..."

"Of course," No. 76 touched her red lips and flirtatiously said, "it doesn't hinder me from serving you, sir."

Yorko felt even more excited.

"We're here. This is your room." No. 76 brought him to a wooden door at the end of the cave carved with 'No. 76', the same as her number. "The room is divided into the inner room and outer room. I'll sleep in the outer room tonight. You can call me whenever you need anything."

Yorko lifted his eyebrows and asked after he opened the door, "This is the outer room?"

The cave was narrower in the front and wider at the back, and the outer room was only big enough to accommodate one person. It was probably similar to sleeping in the stable, as the ground was only covered with a layer of wheat-straw.

"After all, it's difficult to find a suitable room under the ground." The guide indifferently waved and opened the second room door for him.

Additionally, the inner-room was not spacious either. It could not accommodate anything other than a big bed and two soft chairs.

"Mmm! Mmm!"

Yorko saw the witch he bought from the auction once he walked into the house. She was firmly cuffed by the iron hoops on the wall with both her arms and legs opened wide while her mouth was stuffed with a piece of clean white silk. She struggled with fear once she saw that someone walking in.

He was immediately scolding "Black Money" in his heart while twitching his lips twice. He thought that the house was at least divided into several compartments with a cage especially used to imprison the slaves, but it turned out to be so shabby.

"How could I enjoy a long night with No. 76 in this case?"

"Performing a live porn in front of a witch?"

"Give me a break. It'll be even worse than directly doing anything to her." Yorko frowned even deeper when he thought of Otto's order to earn the witch's trust.

"Does 'Black Money' have other rooms? I mean those with extra charges," he helplessly asked.

"Considering some of the customers have higher requirements of the room, we also offer the semi-open houses which are closer to the ground and rooms next to the underground river."

The way that businessmen make money was indeed outrageous.

"How much is the cheapest room?"

"Three gold royals per night."

"This price is enough to pay for a half-a-month stay at the hotel in the inner city of the King's City." Yorko unspokenly criticized. "However, this amount is nothing as compared to 4,000 gold royals. Otto Luoxi shouldn't mind. Consider it as a processing fee."

"You go out and wait for me for a moment," he pondered for a while and said, "I have something to talk to the witch about. I'll call you when I'm done."

"Yes, sir," No. 76 said respectfully and left the room.

As Yorko took off his coat and walked toward the witch, she struggled even harder and looked terrified.

He sighed while covering her body with his cloth and said,

"Listen, I'm entrusted by someone to come here to save you. As long as you don't make any noise, no one is going to hurt you. Everything will be fine. Please nod twice if you understand."

The witch stopped struggling and stared at Yorko for a long while as if she could not believe what she had just heard.

The ambassador had to repeat it as softly and slowly as possible. The witch was very beautiful, but the childish little girl was really not his cup of tea.

She finally nodded this time.

Yorko was relieved and he reached out to remove the silk cloth from the witch's mouth.

"Who're you?" she asked after coughing slightly.

"Someone who has come to save you," Yorko sat down on the bed and asked, "do you have a name?"

"Amy," she paused and said, "Why don't you release me if you're here to save me?"

"What if you run away? I don't have another 4,000 gold royals to buy you again if you get caught," Yorko opened his arms and said, "You'd better be chained for safety and it'll prevent raising any suspicion. I'll set you free tomorrow after we leave, okay?"

"Really?" Amy suspiciously asked.

"She's so gullible. No wonder she was discovered and reported," he quietly thought. "She's lucky to bump into me this time."

"Not only that, I'll introduce you to a place where the witches gather. There are a lot of companions waiting for you. You don't have to keep hiding," Yorko stood up and said, "So, you just need to patiently wait until tomorrow. Do you understand?"

"Hold on, where are you going?"

"I'm going to enjoy a sweet night, of course." He grinned.

When Yorko was just about to call for No. 76, There was a sudden noise in the outer room along with the noise of heavy items muffling. It happened very quickly and the outer room returned to silence after a few seconds.

"No. 76?" He probingly asked but no one answered.

# Chapter 653: An Unexpected Guest

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Damn it!

Yorko was not sure what had happened outside but it definitely would not be good.

"Is 'Black Money' not supposed to be a regular auction, organized by the powerful local businessmen except for the goods being illegal?" He cursed Otto for 10,000 times in his heart. "The auction price was first wrongly estimated and now someone is coming for me. I wouldn't have agreed with him if I knew it would turn out like this."

Yorko looked around and tried to find something to defend himself, but there were no weapons in the room except for some tools to torture the slave.

At this moment, someone pushed open the door and nipped in.

Yorko knelt on the ground without any hesitation and said, "Please spare my life! I'll give you anything you want..."

However, the person did not stop but pounced towards him.

After he finished saying, he subconsciously held his head down and leaned to one side, hoping to dodge the attack.

"No, Annie!"

Amy shouted at the same time.

The cold wind that swept by his cheeks suddenly stopped along with Amy's voice, Yorko tilted his head and noticed that it was a wooden stick, which looked like it was broken off from the chair.

He would probably immediately pass out if he was really beaten.

Then, he was pressed onto the bed from the back after he was grabbed by his shoulder and held up high by a big hand.

"Did he hurt you?" The voice sounded a bit hoarse and it was difficult to distinguish between men's and women's.

"He said... he's here to help me get out of here."

"You've been cheated again, Amy," she said while shaking her head. Then, she twisted Yorko's arms to his back and expertly tied them. "Saving a strange witch with 4,000 gold royals? It's not a small amount of money. It's a lifetime of savings even for your father."

"Aye... Is, is that so?"

She was really the one who was bidding with Yorko as she knew the auction price so clearly. However, how could she recognize



Yoriko and follow them all the way to the room No. 76 when everywhere else was dark other than the bright displaying booth in the limestone cave?

Yoriko knew that it was about his life and his persuasion this time would be for himself instead of his old friends or damn Otto.

"I didn't lie to her! I'm the Ambassador of Graycastle, and saving the witch is the king's order!"

"Ambassador of... Graycastle?"

Yoriko knew that this approach worked when the hand that was holding him down from the back slightly shook.

"Yes, have you heard of Roland Wimbleton? The fourth son of King Wimbleton III, King of Graycastle who's especially kind to the witches! He firmly believes that there are no differences between the witches and ordinary people, and he even fought against the church in order to allow the witches to freely live in his domain! These're all true, I swear!"

Annie might not know who was Roland, but the news that the church was defeated by the Kingdom of Graycastle in Coldwind Ridge was indeed well-known among the people in the city of Glow. He even knew that the news was spread by Hill Fawkes and his assistants. The church had always been the greatest enemy of witches, it was likely that whoever defeated the church would win the witch's kindness and respect for whatever reasons.

The hand that was holding him down on his back was a lot more relaxed as expected. And then, he had been turned over and pulled up from the bed. Yorko could only see the attacker's appearance now.

Annie... was probably a woman but she looked extremely handsome and her body was exceptionally burly even when it was covered by a cope. Both her dashing eyebrows were slightly pointing upwards and her narrow eyes looked energetic. Her hair was tied up into a high-ponytail and her forehead was clearly shown. Yorko would believe that she was a man if her voice was deeper; however, her look made him a little jealous.

"In this case, why didn't you unlock Amy's lock latch?"

"It's the same question again..." Yorko had to repeat the previous statement again. "It's for the sake of her safety. It'll be even more dangerous if she doesn't believe me and sneaks out."

"Where are you going to take her?" Annie, who was obviously not as easily persuaded as Amy, was doubting Yorko's statement. "Giving her to the King of the Kingdom of Graycastle?"

"Of course... not." He quickly changed his words after saying half-way. "My old friend doesn't treat witches as slaves. There were a lot of witches living in his domain like the normal people and they even formed an organization to specialize in protecting the witches' right."

"Enough!" Annie angrily interrupted.

Yorko quickly shut his mouth. He heard all these from Hill when they were talking. He heard that His Majesty curbed the disease spread by the church with the witches' help during the outbreak of demonic plague in the king's city. It was obviously a good thing, but Yorko was not sure why Annie did not look so happy about it.

"It sounds just like the Bloodfang Association," Annie coldly said, "They used to promote themselves in this way as well."

"Blood... what?" Yorko startled but his heart sensed something wrong.

"Witches can only believe in themselves, not the noble's promises." She scanned the room and quickly found the key hanging on the wall.

"Wait, are you bringing her with you?" It's underground here. Don't you see the guards outside the cave when you came in? How're you going to get out?"

You don't have to worry about it. I have my way." Annie unlocked and released Amy. After that, she grabbed Yorko and locked one of his foot on the vervel.

"You really don't want to think about it?" Yorko got bolder when he realized that Annie was not trying to kill him. He was trying to convince her for the last time while he obediently let Annie lock him up. "It's more appropriate for me to bring her out and I'll give her to you when we leave the courtyard. It'll neither easily raise

any suspicion nor causing any problem in this case."

"It does sound great, but it's also possible that I'll be welcomed by swords and God's Stone instead," Annie remained unmoved and said, "I had made a big mistake because of my credulity before and it won't happen again."

After Yorko was firmly locked, Annie dragged No. 76 in. She tied both her hands to her back and locked one of her foot as well.

"Why didn't you kill her?"

He could see the blood stained on No. 76's head, who was apparently badly beaten up and still currently unconscious. However, she was still alive judging from the slight movements of her chest.

"It'll not be too late for me to kill both of you after I rescue Amy." Annie's words made Yorko shivered. "But I'll not kill you now as we perhaps owed the King of the Kingdom of Graycastle a thank for defeating the church. However, it doesn't mean that I'll believe him unconditionally."

"I'll bring your words to His Majesty. Besides, you can come to the embassy to look for me if you need any assistance." "Of course, it's best not to as we can also save a lot of effort," Yorko quietly thought to himself, "and it may be for the better as I've tried my best. Even my old friend can't blame me as I can't force them if they're not willing to go to the Kingdom of Graycastle."

Annie turned around and stared at him for a long while before she carried Amy and left the room.

# Chapter 654: The Compensation of [Black Money]

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"Hey, are you okay?" Yorko pushed No. 76 with the other foot, but the latter was completely unresponsive.

He sighed, drew close to her, and then picked up the coat on the ground with his mouth to cover both of them.

"Forget the romantic night. Just suck it up for this single night."

After such unexpected turns, he found himself surprisingly calm. The underground auction, the 4000 gold royals he wasted on a witch, the public attention he drew, and then the attack of the witches... Over one night, he experienced more than he had ever experienced during the past twenty-some years of his life.

"Hmm.. this thrilling and stimulating feeling seems not to be as bad as I imagined?"

Of course, Yorko would never agree to experience it once again.

He had a fitful night. It was already noon the following day by the time they were found by a servant of the "Black Money".

Then Yorko was quickly transferred to a spacious and comfortable room. Not only was he served soft bread and freshly squeezed juice by the servants, but he was checked by the maids

from head to heels as well, even including his manhood between his legs.

Also at his request, Otto Luoxi, who had been anxiously waiting outside, was taken into the limestone cave.

"What happened?" As soon as Otto saw the Ambassador, he asked eagerly, "I heard that you got injured."

"I need a private minute with this gentleman." Yorko dismissed the servants sent by "Black Money" before describing the whole story in detail, "I was almost killed because of you. It was so close! I nearly lost my life! Fortunately, they found I was so kind and tender to the witch that I bought at the auction. If it were someone else, he would certainly be dead and cold now!"

Complaining had been an ace up his sleeve, which brought him good fortune in the Kingdom of Graycastle for many years. Even if he could not get any practical benefits, at least he could make others feel guilty or sympathetic for him, which he might take advantage of in the future. Otto seemed to be so worried now, so he would certainly do something to compensate him.

As expected, Otto appeared very uneasy and said, "This happened due to my negligence. I will certainly compensate for it after we go back."

"What about the 4000 gold royals?"

"The witch escaped from your room. That's the territory of "Black Money", so I guess they won't charge you for the auction."

"Then didn't you save a lot of money?" Yorko teased, "you saved the witch, and at the same time made good use of the Black Letter."

"The black letters will be re-made for each exhibition, so I can't say it's wasted or not," Otto forced a smile and said, "but it did save us the gold royals."

Yorko suddenly remembered what No. 76 had whispered in his ear.

"You just need to pay 500 gold royals to Black Money."

"Sir, do you want to buy me?"

Compared to 4000, 500 seemed to be a more reasonable number. Perhaps he could let Otto pay again as the compensation for the shock he experienced.

Yorko cleared his throat and prepared to speak when the bedroom door was pushed open. A man with a silver mask came, accompanied by two attendants. He appeared to be quite old, as his dark brown hair was mixed with white hair. He wore a loose silk robe with a particularly eye-catching black dragon head logo on his chest.

"I'm in charge of the exhibition. You can call me Silvermask," he



said with a slight bow, "'Black money' apologizes for what happened to you. Fortunately, you were not injured in the accident. We have begun to investigate how the witch fled, and we'll inform you once we found her whereabouts. We won't deduct the payment from the Black Letter unless you still want the witch when we capture her."

"Ahem... I see," Yorko cleared his throat. After all, he, instead of Otto Luoxi, was the one who bought the witch, so he had to continue to feign his interest in her, "Don't give her to anyone except me. The 10th round will always be valid."

"As you wish."

"By the way, I wonder how the attacker got in the exhibition."

"These villains hijacked other visiting guests. At an outskirt house, we have found two other victims who were robbed of the Black Letter," Silvermask replied.

"More than one villain?"

"Yes, this was a premeditated act," he nodded. "We didn't expect the witch has other accomplices, or that they dare to launch a raid under King of Dawn's intense search of witches. Did the villain who hijacked you leave any clues?"

"Well... No, she fled after hearing that I was the Ambassador of Graycastle." Yorko shrugged and said, "Haven't the 'Black Money'

ever thought of a more reliable way of checking the identity? If anyone can enter just by an invitation letter, I am afraid it is not the first time that this kind of thing happened?"

"You're definitely right," said Silvermask with laughter, "but it's also the charm of 'Black Money'. Compared to the risk, people prefer to get their favorite goods without revealing their identity. Of course, when issuing Black Letter, we will carefully consider our clients, including how much they care about the Black Letter and their ability to keep it. No matter how the two hijacked men got the Black Letter, they certainly won't have a second chance to get invitations."

"Alright," said Yorko, shrugging. "So how did she escape from the underground cave? I remember there were many guards in the passage from the cave to the yard, and she could not possibly get out while carrying an injured witch. Is it possible that they still hide somewhere in the cave, waiting until you're off guard?"

Silvermask shook his head, "They crept out of the vent. Several iron bars were burned, which should be caused by a witch's ability."

"So this is the escaping route prepared by Annie. And it seemed that more than one witches participated in this rescue. Otto did everything for nothing." "In that case, there's nothing you can do about it," said Yorko. He then pretended to ask casually, "how's my guide now?"

"She'll be severely punished by 'Black Money'. As a guide, it's her responsibility to protect her distinguished guests. She's no longer

qualified for this position."

"Can I see her?"

"Do you mean... you want to punish her personally?"

"No," Yorko looked at Otto. "I want to buy her."

"But she's already a prisoner of 'Black Money'", Silvermask said hesitantly.

"500 gold royals? I'll pay it with the Black Letter."

"Wait a minute... Mr. Ambassador?" Otto asked in surprise, "what guide?"

Yorko pressed Otto's hand but did not answer.

Silvermask nodded after a moment of silence, "I see. If you insist, we'll give No. 76 to you as a gift."

"A gift?" Yorko was first stunned and then felt very pleased.

"Since she can no longer be a guide, it's a better choice to give her to you. Just take it as the compensation of 'Black Money' for this accident," Silvermask bowed again and said, "I hope we can meet here again."

# Chapter 655: In the Depth of the Limestone Cave

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Holding the Stone of Lighting, Banach Lothar walked step by step toward the depth of the Black Money.

It was such a steep ramp that he had to stumble along it even with the help of his servants.

"I've finally become old." Sadness suddenly appeared in his heart. Since he was 20, he had taken over the family business and had created a giant Chamber of Commerce which was rich and powerful. His struggle and excitement during those years were beyond description. Even if he only received an honorary title as a knight, his reputation and status were not lower than that of the three noble families in the Kingdom of Dawn.

However, it did not mean that his great achievement could be passed down to future generations. In fact, as the scale of the Chamber of Commerce continued to expand, the foundation was already at stake. In those days, in order to consolidate the strength of the Chamber of Commerce, many large businessmen, even the upper noble, were invited to join the chamber. When he was alive, they might be reliable supports or worthwhile tools, but what if he passed away? Would they be willing to stay in their current position?

There was hardly any need to answer this question.

Banach had five sons and one daughter, among whom the most outstanding one was his fourth son, Victor Lothar. Even though he was only 21 years old, he had shown extraordinary business talents. But at this age, he could not overpower those crafty partners yet. The Chamber of Commerce was not the private property of the Lothars; therefore, if he forced them to accept Victor to take over his position, he was afraid that he would face strong oppositions.

By that time, the Chamber of Commerce would be broken into pieces, and what was worse, his children might lose their lives.

What if he abandoned the giant chamber he had created in his whole life? Banach was indeed unwilling to do so.

Pondering over this, he suddenly slipped.

"Sir, watch your steps!" The servants around him immediately held him on his arm.

Banach stumbled about a few steps before he managed to stand steadily.

Obviously, his body had lost the vigor of youth.

He was already 69 years old, and how many times could he try to walk along such a steep ramp? He had to hurry up.

Once he thought of the promise given by the Oracle, flames of hope were lighted in his heart again.

Only after he became one of them, could he solve this seemingly insoluble problem forever.

Gradually, the ramp downward became flat, and the air became moist. Banach faintly heard the sound of the undercurrent hitting the rock like continuous thunder, dull and solid. Honestly, he did not like such a place, which was secretive enough but gave no sense of security. He always feared that one day the water would crush the cave walls and completely engulf the cave.

In fact, quite a few similar cases had already happened in this cave group. Several tunnels had turned into deep pools due to the flow backward of the undercurrent and eventually had to be closed. The Black Money only occupied a small part of the cave group. If Banach had enough time, he could even make it into an underground city.

When he arrived at the bottom of the ramp, the light instantly became bleak. The Stone of Lighting was still shining, but it was no longer bright enough for him to see the rock walls on both sides, as the size of the cave suddenly increased several times larger.

The sound of the undercurrent became extremely loud. It seemed that a branch was passing underfoot.

In the deep cave, two yellow flames were shining in the distance.

They were the guards sent by the Oracle to pick him up.

"OK, stop and wait here."

"But Sir, it's still a long way..." the servants said with worries.

"That's all right. I have to walk the last part of this road by myself," Banach slowly said.

The servants dared not to persuade him anymore due to his years of authority, so they just said, "Yes, Sir, please mind your steps!"

After leaving the cave hole, he carefully walked to the center of the cave. The cave at the bottom of the limestone cave group was very strange, which was shaped like an island. It was surrounded by bottomless gullies and the central bulged Rockhill was connected with the ramp by a narrow stone bridge. When he walked through the bridge, he was surrounded by darkness while the Magic Stone could only illuminate as far as several dozen meters. If he were not directed by the yellow light at the end of the bridge, Banach would even feel as if he was walking in the abyss of hell, and the roaring sound of water at the feet was the whining of the ghosts and evil spirits.

Mist gradually rose around, and the scope of the light was further reduced due to the too much water vapor. He knew he had to be particularly careful, as green moss was likely to grow on the bridge. If he had slipped down from the bridge, even the Oracle could not save him.

In the moist air, Banach Lothar finally reached the central stone island.

He was panting when the guards of the Oracle turned to walk backward and said, "Come with me. Master Oracle has been waiting for you for a long time."

Having no time to complain, he took a deep breath and followed the two guards' footsteps.

The top of this isolated island-like Rockhill was about 100 paces wide, and the place to meet the Oracle was located within the Rockhill. Before stepping on the rock stairs around the hill, Banach noticed that behind the limestone cave there was an extremely spacious cave which echoed with the ramp he had met earlier to form a straight line. That cave was larger and much closer to the Rockhill. In the light of the Magic Stone, he found that it was a standard round cave and its edge was very smooth as if it was carved by men.

If he guessed right, the guards of the Oracle entered the Kingdom of Dawn through these underground passages.

When he finally entered the Rockhill, he had been too tired to stand straight.

Fortunately, the Oracle would not mind his posture when meeting him. The guards brought a soft cushion and asked him to sit down in the stone room which covered about 10 square meters. Then they drew the heavy cloth curtain to block the sound of the



undercurrent.

"Are you ready?" One of them asked.

"Yes, please allow me to meet Master Oracle." Banach wiped the sweat from his forehead. Though his body was exhausted, his heart was full of expectation.

At these words, the Stone of Lighting on his hand suddenly flashed, and so were the magic stones in the hands of the two guards.

Then the three magic stones were extinguished in turn, and darkness enveloped the stone room. As it was not the first time that he had seen such a scene, Banach did not feel surprised; instead, he was full of amazement and awe at the power of the Oracle. Soon a purple light curtain rose from the ground, turning the darkness around into a different view.

It was also the deep underground, but red lava flowed beneath it. Countless rivers of flames gushed from the rock holes and converged at the bottom to form a cobweb-like picture. Above the flames was the body of the Oracle, a giant sarcoma hanging on the rock wall with numerous plant-like roots. The tangled epidermis bulged rhythmically as if it was breathing hot air.

It had neither eyes nor mouth, but it could see and talk to him by directly echoing in his mind.

This was the real appearance of the Oracle.

It did not need to transform into a human figure because itself meant extraordinary.

Banach Lothar respectfully lowered his head.

# Chapter 656: The Oracle and the Chosen One

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A female voice directly appeared in Banach's mind. "Please feel free to talk to me. What happened above?"

Instead of speaking, he only needed to whisper in his heart to give the answer. He found that although this way of communicating was hard to get used to in the beginning, it was actually a faster and more effective way. Meanwhile, he also found it harder to lie in this way.

Banach told the oracle what had happened through his thoughts. "Holy oracle, something unexpected happened. They didn't accept the invitation from Ambassador of Graycastle. This is my mistake. I didn't expect that it would be so hard for them to drop their guard."

The oracle did not blame him but said wistfully, "it's hard to predict what people are thinking. Do you have any remedial measure?"

"They've got to accept the ambassador's invitation. It's just a matter of time." He paused for a moment. "Because of His Majesty Appen Moya's new policy."

"Tut... common man."

Banach was startled and asked, "what can I do for you, holy oracle?"

"I don't like this witch removal policy. Can you guarantee that nobody will be hurt?"

"I..." Banach did not know what to say, because he knew that once this policy was implemented, it would be inevitable that some witches were caught or even killed. Given that the oracle had only ordered him to drive the witches to go southwards into the Western Region of Graycastle without ensuring the safety of their lives, he thought it would be none of his business to care about how many would survive during the journey.

"Is this what you think?" The oracle raised her voice in a sudden. All her tentacles wriggled and the underground hot lava started to surge, showing her anger. "Don't forget what I said. Before the doomsday, every witch is crucial!"

From the way she reacted, Banach gathered something had gone wrong and then realized that he had been talking with her through the thoughts. In this way, everything he thought would be directly transmitted to her. He quickly explained, "no, holy oracle, I remember every word you've said. I don't want to hurt anyone innocent, either, but if I do it that way, it'll take a longer time and require rearrangement of my people. After all, not everyone has the courage to defy the king's rules and at the same time keeps this secret."

The oracle quickly replied, "I'll send my guards to help you. How long will it take?"

Banach breathed a sigh of relief, as he had witnessed those guards' abilities. Generally speaking, knights were not able to compete with them at all, and some less capable ones could not even see their movements clearly. If two or three guards fought together, they could easily defeat 20 to 30 knights, which also showed the extraordinary power of the oracle.

"I can complete the third step of the plan in two weeks."

"All right, just do it."

"Holy oracle..." Banach hesitated and continued. "Are the witches that important? Do the deities only bless them? In terms of wealth or power, I'll make a better—"

The oracle interrupted, "a better choice for the Chosen One? You've got no idea. Neither wealth nor power will be useful when the doomsday is approaching. The deities are looking for a savior who knows how to use the divine power instead of a secular spokesman. Common man, you're helpful, indeed, so when the mission is completed, I'll give you an appropriate reward, such as immortality, but you also need to recognize your own position."

Banach knew about the doomsday. Every 400 years, a bloody moon would appear in the sky and then the Gates of Hell would open. Demons would come swarming out of the gates, slaughtering the human beings across the continent, and the person who could resist these cruel enemies was the Chosen One. Today, he knew more about the Chosen One through the talk with the oracle. She seemed to be searching for someone who can directly connect to the powerful deities and this someone must be a witch.

Not wanting to give up now, he asked again, "but... are you sure that the Chosen One was definitely among the witches in the Kingdom of Graycastle?"

The oracle remained speechless for a while, which was an unusual thing. After that, she said, "no one knows the answer. This is just another try, and we've tried this for many times in the past hundreds of years."

"What if we still can't find the one this time?"

"We'll keep searching until the doomsday when the human world is completely destroyed."

Thinking that it would be meaningless to become immortal if all the human beings died, Banach smiled bitterly and promised, "I see, I'll do my best to complete the task."

All the sarcoma's tentacles danced simultaneously, which indicated that the oracle was content. "Here's another thing I want to ask... Is the church really defeated?"

Since the news that the church had suffered a crushing defeat had reached the Kingdom of Dawn, the oracle had paid particular attention to this issue. She had even ordered Banach to send his men to the Coldwind Ridge to confirm it.

"Yes, at the foot of the Coldwind Ridge, the battlefield looked as if

it had been trampled by demonic beasts, with deep pits and trenches everywhere. Around it stood thousands of grave mounds. According to the locals, they were built by the King of Graycastle. He had bought all the dead bodies of his soldiers back to the Western Region and burnt and buried all the church's dead people at the spot. Merchants who came back from the Hermes Plateau told us that prosperity had already left the Holy City and there was only a dead silence in it."

Hearing this, the oracle's voice instantly turned soft. "This is their end..." After a moment, she quickly recovered and said, "that's all for today's conversation. I'm tired."

"Yes, holy oracle," Banach bowed and said.

The underground scene went out like ebbing tides, quickly leaving them in darkness. The Magic Stones flickered several times and then lit up the stone room.

Everything that had happened was just like a dream now.

A guard came up to Banach and gave him a porcelain bottle, saying, "here's the medicine for this time. Drink it. Holy oracle was very pleased with your recent work."

"Th-Thanks, your holy oracle." With great excitement, Banach took the bottle and swigged down all the liquid inside it.

Right after this, he felt a warm torrent flow out of his stomach to

rejuvenate his whole body. This medicine could make him feel dexterous and quick in action, but this effect would not last for a very long time. It could not make him live longer, either. Based on what the oracle had said, it could only improve his health and relieve fatigue and restore the body's vigour in a short time. She had said that before he was bestowed immortality, he needed to take this medicine to mend his weak body. Otherwise, the great pain during the process of turning into an immortal would tear him into pieces.

Her honesty in telling him the truth about this medicine further strengthened his faith in her, as he believed that if this was a fraud, she would only need to offer him this magic medicine whose rejuvenating effect could attract lots of noble men and wealthy merchants like him.

Three years ago, he had had to move around sitting in a wheelchair pushed by a servant. Now, at least, he could stand and walk on his two feet. This was the improvement the medicine had brought him.

He was confident that if he could get immortality after completing the mission the oracle had given him, all the knotty problems he had now would be solved smoothly.

He lifted the curtain door and walked toward the rock stairs of the hill with his back straight and his head held erect.

Feeling totally different from the time he had walked to the stone room, now he felt energetic even in the humid cold winds. His steps were steady, and the roaring underground river sounded like



horns encouraging him to move forward.

# Chapter 657: A Secret Shared by Two Girls

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Roland poured himself a cup of tea and looked at Nightingale. "Would you like some?"

"Yes, thank you."

Lying on the couch, she was reading a newly written play by May with great interest. She was holding the book with one hand and a piece of dried fish with another hand.

Since Anna had talked to her, she had disappeared for two days. When she returned, she looked relieved, free and easy, as she had been before. Since her return, Roland felt that she kept smiling at him and sometimes peeped at him with eyes full of vitality.

Took what she was doing now as an example.

She put her feet on the tea table and moved her robe to one side, revealing her long slim legs in black tight stockings. She did not avoid him at all and would only conceal herself when someone else came into the office. This attractive posture made it hard for the prince to focus. He could hardly stop his eyes from involuntarily moving to the side sometimes. As a result, he had not finished even a single blueprint in the first half of the morning.

He complained in his heart, "I knew I shouldn't have asked

Soraya to paint these stocking-like leg warmers."

He took a cup of delicately fragranced tea to her and said, "here's your tea."

She put down the book and took the tea with both hands. She sniffed at it and said, "ah... nice tea. Could you please add a lump of sugar for me?"

He found that she enjoyed both salty and sweet food, and no matter how much she ate, she would never get fat. When he had been in his lethargy, she had lost lots of weight and looked much thinner than before, but after he had woken up, she had quickly gotten back her normal weight. Her weight seemed to have an upper limit. When she reached it, she would stop gaining any more weight.

He had nagged her to stop eating too much or she would get fat, but now he realized that was not a problem for her at all.

He added a lump of sugar to her teacup and returned to his desk. After painting several strokes on the paper, he still could not stop himself from being curious and said, "Nightingale..."

"Uhm?"

"What indeed... did Anna tell you?"

"Well..." She nimbly slipped out of the couch and instantly

appeared on his desk. "It's a secret."

"Can't you even tell me?"

After a little hesitation, she shook her head and said, "no, I've promised Anna. If it's just about me, I'll tell you whatever you want to know, but this is not... She asked me to keep it up my sleeve for now."

"Well, I see." Roland took a sip of his tea and stopped asking. He could go to ask Anna directly, but as a person of normal EQ, he knew he must stop mentioning this thing repeatedly.

At least, from Nightingale's reaction he could tell that Anna was not angry.

When he picked up his quill again, Nightingale suddenly said, "thank you."

"What?" Rowland was stunned and looked up, his gaze met hers.

In the warm autumn sunshine, her long blonde hair shone, her skin glowed and her face looked exceptionally beautiful. Time seemed to stop at this moment.

"Thank you for telling her what I feel."

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In the afternoon, good news came from the Ministry of Construction. Neverwinter's first converter steel mill, a steelmaking facility recently designed by Roland, was completed at the North Slope Mountain.

Despite that it was called a steel mill, it looked more like a simple iron shed with a large new equipment in it. Different from all the previous furnaces, this equipment was made of pure steel, supported by an angular grate and covered with heat resistance coating. Its surface was dark gray and dull, making the machine look towering and thick in the sunshine.

When Roland arrived at this new Furnace Area with his City Hall officials, this new furnace had been surrounded by a large number of curious experienced workers.

"Your Majesty, can this stove make steel? It doesn't even have a fire place." Lesya of the Ministry of Construction had asked the same question, but he had still built it up in strict accordance with Roland's design. This converter's components were all processed by Anna. With Hummingbird's help, their heavy weight had not caused any trouble during the construction which was finished in just a week.

Roland smiled and said, "in the nature, fire isn't the only thing that produces heat. Let the workers get ready for the equipment's first test run."

Roland had compared three most frequently used steelmaking

facilities, open hearth furnace, converter, and electric furnace. He had firstly ruled out electric furnace because of the lack of necessary conditions and decided on a converter after a long and thoughtful consideration.

With the simplest structure among the three choices, an open hearth furnace was similar to a traditional smelter in terms of operation, but it also had a significant drawback in energy consumption. It required a huge amount of fuel in steel making, which would definitely pose a threat to Neverwinter's limited supply of energy resources. Given that its coal mines were located far away at the source of the Redwater River and that its coking plant was just put into use and could barely meet the demand of the blast furnace iron smelting, adapting open hearth steelmaking would soon lead to an acute shortage of fuel.

Choosing a converter would avoid such a problem, as it hardly cost any fuel. It kept the liquid iron at a high temperature to continue the smelting process, using the heat generated by the oxidation of impurities contained in pig iron, such as manganese, silicon and carbon.

The other shortcomings of an open hearth furnace included occupying a too large area and a long smelting time. To make the best use of fuel, a regenerator should be built for an open hearth furnace to heat the air in advance, and making each batch of liquid steel would took this facility over half a day. By comparison, a converter took up less room, as it needed no additional device and its orbit could double as a transmission line for the liquid steel. It also worked more efficiently. Each of its smelting process only took dozens of minutes and this smelting time could be further shortened to 15 minutes when the technology was mature.

In view of these two points, Roland decided to choose converters as the main facilities for Neverwinter's steel production.

The workers used an steam engine to put a batch of crude iron ingots into the furnace shaped like a pear.

"Anna, make a fire."

She nodded and walked up the stairs to the top of the converter. She summoned her Blackfire to melt the Iron Ingots into liquid iron in a short time, and the hot red liquid soon lit up her face.

He planned to use the liquid iron produced by the blast furnace for this steel mill in mass production. That was the reason why he built it here in the Furnace Area.

He said to the leader of the steelmaking team, "now, follow my instructions. Insert the blowing pipe into the furnace mouth."

This was the first time for them to use a converter, but for these experienced workers who had operated similar equipment, controlling this pipe was as easy as controlling a trailer. In the booming noise of the steam engine, a steel pipe slowly fell into the furnace from the top.

The other end of the pipe was connected to a coated flexible tube which led to an air pump driven by an steam engine. When the oxygen-rich air was inhaled into the converter, raging flames

sparked to life at the furnace mouth. Orange sparkles splattered from the furnace, looking like fireworks. Glaring white flames made it hard for people around to open their eyes.

All the officials marveled at this spectacular sight.

Roland got a sense of fulfillment, feeling the hot air blowing on his face.

He saw these flames as an emblem of human beings' entering a new era.



# Chapter 658: Dreams and Steel

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As the liquid iron rolled over and over in the converter, the silicon and manganese in it were oxidized first after which it was the turn of the carbon in the pig iron.

At a temperature of nearly 1,500 degrees, the carbon reacted with the oxygen in the air, producing carbon monoxide and a lot of heat which made the liquid boil in the furnace. The flames gushing out of the furnace mouth almost enveloped the blowing pipe and the grate. That was why Roland made them coated with heat resistance coating.

A large amount of hot carbon monoxide were forced outward. It mixed with the air outside and burnt violently, looking as if the furnace were set afire. The noises caused by gas expansion even drowned the booming sounds of the steam engine. As this scene easily evoked an image of an erupting volcano, all the people moved backward simultaneously in fright, except Roland who still stood in the place, with both of his hands behind his back. He faced the strong hot winds, totally besotted with the awe-inspiring roars of the surging steel liquid.

He thought it was a pity that he could not use pure oxygen in this process at present due to technological limitations. Otherwise, the flames would shine even more brightly.

When oxides of phosphorus and sulfur, which were the last elements that were oxidized, reacted with limestone and became furnace slags, the flames began to dim and the liquid iron became molten steel. As the furnace slags were lighter, they were floating

on it. The workers could pour the liquid steel out through the steel-tapping hole by tilting the furnace as easily as pouring a cup of tea.

To prevent the slags from entering into the steel ladle, a modern steel mill would use a slag-stopping ball, a slag-stopping spear or infrared detection, which was beyond Neverwinter's technical capacity. Given that, Roland came up with a simple solution which was not pouring out all the liquid. He instructed the workers to erect the furnace when there were still some liquid steel in it, and then he asked them to dump all the left liquid steel together with the furnace slags. As he was not pursuing productivity efficiency, he did not care about such a little waste. Besides, when he collected enough wasted liquid steel, he could put them back into the furnace to make steel again.

To ensure the quality of the steel, the last step was to eliminate excess oxygen in the liquid steel.

The alumina poured in Neverwinter from Longsong Stronghold could make excellent deoxidizers. A bucket of pure aluminum extracted by Lucia was added to the liquid steel, and soon aluminum oxide furnace slags and excess liquid aluminum started to float to the surface. At this moment, the whole steelmaking process was accomplished.

Seeing the bright molten steel being poured into the mold and turning into steel ingots, all the officials of City Hall were too stunned to utter a word.

In this era, people usually relied on blacksmiths to hit on the hot

iron repeatedly for a long time to produce steel, and a whole set of steel armors would be treasured as a family heirloom. No one had seen that steel could be made this way. "Star of Steel" had been able to produce lots of steel, but it was run by magic powers. They all knew that without Anna and Lucia, it could hardly produce anything.

However, this time was different, as converter steelmaking required no magic power but common workers. They realized something after witnessing this whole manual operation.

They were clear that they could not create another "Star of Steel", but they could certainly build more converters and train countless workers.

Given that, steel was no longer a rare material. A huge amount of this solid metal would be produced at the foot of the North Slope Mountain to replace those soft and fragile materials, such as wood and bronze.

Roland was happy to see the surprise and excitement on the officials' faces. He believed that they would not be excellent leaders if they were not thrilled by this brand new steelmaking process. Common workers might only be amazed by the steel ingots in front of them, but the officials should see the changes and the future brought by this new technology.

By now, Neverwinter's coal & iron compound manufacturing industry had been formed. Mining, ironmaking, steelmaking and steel-casting processes could all be completed by common people. With a fast-growing population and a rapidly expanding education,

Roland now felt that he could hear the steel wheels rolling over the ground, ushering in a new era.

As to the quality of this first batch of rolled steel, he decided to let Lucia check it. After that, he could base on her results to adjust the air blowing time and to improve the slags removing methods. He felt good seeing this achievement.

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However, he did not want to have a rest after that, as he still had lots of work to do with the memories he retrieved in the Dream World.

As he had completed all the primary textbooks, he planned to search for some professional books on machinery. He needed high-performance processing equipment as Neverwinter would soon be able to produce a large amount of steel. Those simple machine tools he had made previously could hardly process some high-end products, such as Longsong Cannons, heavy machine guns, and grenade fuze.

Where could he find those books?

He believed that the library of the school was the place he should go. It had been said to be a place full of romantic encounters, but he had had none during all his visits to that place when he had been a student. Despite that, he had really read lots of books there, including many on mechanical design.

After dinner, he went to bed early.

As traveling in the Dream World could not count as a rest, he would be very tired for the first day in that world. Besides, it was impossible for him to take an afternoon nap in his apartment there without an air conditioner in hot weather. Under such circumstances, he had to sleep early and save energy for his activities in the Dream World.

Waking up in that world, it was still a clear sunny morning in the midsummer.

He looked at his mobile phone at the bedside and saw a dozen missed calls. He touched the screen and found that all of them were from secondhand goods dealers. They had also sent him many text messages.

"Hey, bro, do you have any more armors? One of my friends wants to buy some to shoot a film. If you do, call me."

"I can offer you a higher price this time, 700 yuan. How's it?"

"The price for the swords will also be increased by 200 yuan. I'm a true pal, right? But don't sharpen the blades. Otherwise, that's way too scary."

"If you're unsatisfied with the prices, we can talk about it."

"Come on, bro. Could you give me an answer?"

Roland slid to the last message. It was from his bank, telling him that the remaining balance of his account was 3,600 yuan and 1,500 yuan of it was remitted by Zero's parents as her living expenses.

The money could support him for quite a long time.

He tapped with his finger to delete all the messages and put on his T-shirt and shorts before going into the living room.

At this moment, Zero was still in bed.

Not wanting to wait for the little girl to wake up and make breakfast, he directly walked downstairs and found a small rice noodle restaurant in the lane.

He sat in it and said, "a big bowl of rice noodle with shredded meat, please."

"Yes!"

He thought that as he had money now, he must give himself a treat which was not available even in the king's city of Graycastle. After all, the kingdom had no rice at all.

Soon, a steaming bowl of rice noodles fresh from the pot was served for him. While eating the breakfast, he looked at the apartment building.

By now, he had only visited the secondhand bookstore and the small Internet Cafe two blocks away, busy with making money and memorizing books. This was the first time for him to have leisure to sit down and observe the residents of the Apartment of Souls.

# Chapter 659: Rules of the Dream World

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Apparently, the Dream World had accepted all the losers in the Soul Battlefield, as no one in this world found it strange seeing their various hair colors and different facial features.

For example, Roland himself had long gray hair, light gray eyes and a straight nose with a high nose bridge, which would attract all the attention when he walked in the streets of the community where he had lived in modern times.

However, in this world, all these strange looking people lived just like the common ones. On their way to catch buses, young men were rushing about with their newspapers and briefcases under their arms, while chewing deep-fried dough sticks. Elderly people gathered in twos and threes on the open space in front of the apartment building. Some were moving their limbs and doing their morning exercises. Some laid out Chinese chess boards, ready to play with their friends.

The chirping of cicadas, the city noises and the sounds of morning reading, babies crying and hucksters shouting were all wafted to his ears by the morning breeze, creating a characteristic symphony of the tube-shaped apartment building.

Roland cherished the scene which was full of life.

Right at this moment, a woman running along the lane was getting near to him.



Seeing this woman, Roland nearly dropped his chopsticks involuntarily. To his great surprise, she was Garcia Wimbledon.

She tied her hair up and wore light sportswear, baring her white thighs and hanging a towel around her neck. Her sweat had soaked her collar and pinpricks of sweat covered her arms. She must have been running for quite a long time.

He was more surprised seeing all the people in the lane fixing their eyes on her and some even whistling at her. These people looked so excited as if they were looking at a star.

However, Garcia did not give a fig to the crowd. She continued running through the lane as fast as the wind and disappeared into the corridor entrance of the apartment building.

"That's Garcia!" someone in the rice noodle restaurant exclaimed.

"Now you believe what I told you. If you get up early, you'll get the chance to see her. As long as the weather is good, she'll run for an hour here."

"It's the first time for me to meet a TV star."

"She looks much better than on TV."

"Oh yeah, Garcia will have an important match very soon."

"I'll support her anyway. I hope that she'll win the final."

"Of course, she will. She's such a genius!"

Everybody was talking about her, leaving Roland dumbfounded. He wondered why all the residents here were so familiar with Garcia and what the match they were talking about was. He thought, "is she a rising sports star or something?"

To confirm his guess, he took out his wallet after drinking all the remaining soup in his bowl and asked the owner when he came over to clean the table, "what was going on? Is that woman famous?"

The owner looked at him in disbelief, saying, "you're not living here, right? Who in this Tongzi Street doesn't know Miss Garcia?"

Hearing this, he became even more curious and said to the owner, "I've just moved in recently. What does she do?"

"She's a martial fighter!"

"Pfft." Roland nearly spat in the owner's face. "Ahem... what?"

"Come on, go to watch TV by yourself. She's the most famous person in this area, and it's because of her that we can continue to live here."

"Why?"

The owner pointed somewhere behind Roland and said, "look there."

He turned around and noticed something he had missed when he had come here. On the wall opposite to this restaurant, there was a big word saying "Removal".

"House removal?"

"Yes, some development company has long wanted to pull down the whole Tongzi Street to build a new skyscraper here. That company said that this block was too old and unsightly for a downtown zone. Bullshit, it's clearly a cultural relic building!" The owner sighed while searching his bag for Roland's change. "Those guys want to relocate us all to the suburbs. If Garcia didn't expose their plot on TV and gain wide support for us, the developer would start to drive us away at this moment."

Roland's mouth twisted. "That's really... an outrage."

"That's why all of us support Miss Garcia." The owner smiled and tamped the change into his hand. "Since you're now a member of the Tongzi Street, you'll become her fan soon!"

...

Roland understood that the Dream World might use some

incredible methods to piece together irrelevant memory fragments, but what had happened just now was too bizarre to believe.

What's a martial fighter? Some new Olympic event?

And demolition of Apartment of Souls? No kidding! All the doors connected to the memory fragments are here in the building, and so is the creator of this world!

And I have to thank my elder sister for making it possible for me to live here?

With complicated feelings, he returned to his No. 0825 apartment, and Zero happened to get out of her bedroom with sleepy eyes.

Her hair was in a mess and her dress was wrinkled. One side of the dress's neckline dropped down, revealing half of her shoulder. She said, "uncle, you get up? I'll go to make breakfast right now."

"No, I've had breakfast and I bring you something to eat."

He put the omelet, steamed pork dumplings and milk he bought on the table and then turned on the television.

With a puzzled expression on her face, she sat by the table and asked, "why do you get up so early recently?"

"I told you that I got a job, so I can't sleep late in the morning anymore. You parents remitted your living expenses to me, and my company paid me my first month's salary. We don't have to worry about money for now."

"Use your money wisely. Who knows how long will it last. Besides, we haven't finished the food stored in the refrigerator yet." Having said that, Zero still quickly devoured her breakfast.

Roland asked her, "by the way, do you know Garcia?"

She twitched her mouth and said, "of course, sister Garcia is such a talent. She joined Martialist Association at the age of 20, and I heard that she held an unbeaten record in the preliminaries. All my classmates regard her as an idol, but I think it's boring to watch this kind of fighting matches on the stage. "

Though he was a little bothered by the fact that he was called uncle while Garcia was called sister, he still put this aside and focused on what he wanted to investigate. Based on what the little girl had said just now, the martial fighters in this world even formed their own organization.

He asked, "are there... many martial fighters?"

"There are only a few." Zero darted a look of disapproval at him. "Uncle, please stop thinking about it. Not everyone has such a talent. Only those awakening with Force of Nature will get the chance to become martial fighters, and awakening is just the basic

requirement. Without determination and perseverance, even an awakened talent will become a puppet of some great power and bring troubles to the people. "

"Uhm... how do you know so much about them?"

"Our teacher told us. He also said that as compared to imagining ourselves becoming martial fighters, we'd better do more exercises and try to become useful people for the community." She went to the bathroom to get washed and then walked to the door carrying her schoolbag. "I've got a full day today, bye."

When Zero left, Roland opened his hand, feeling the strange power in it.

Is this Force of Nature?

His interest in the Dream World increased dramatically. The "puppet of great power" somehow reminded him of a magic power bite. He wondered how this world integrated all the devoured memories and what the rules behind it were.

He had planned to go to the library of the school.

However, now he had a new idea.

# Chapter 660: Manifestation of Power - Immerse Yourself in Mystical Adventures - Webnovel - Immerse Yourself in Mystical Adventures

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Roland spent the whole day searching every TV channel.

He watched several martial arts fighting programs. Different from the traditional fighting matches, this kind of competition was held in an arena as large as half of a football field. With no judge in the arena, the fighting was extremely intense. It was not a rare thing to see the fighters break the floor in the heat of a match, and loud sounds like muffled thunders could be heard when the fighters exchanged blows, which were like special effects added to this match.

In terms of competitiveness and charm, it was indeed better than boxing and freestyle fighting. All the martial fighters fought in a literal sense, with no rounds being counted for them and no half-time intervals interrupting the competition. No wonder the audience would get so excited watching this kind of fighting. Roland could not help but knit his eyebrows whenever he saw a martial fighter spit out blood or get massively injured, thinking, "these martial fighters really go too far. Aren't they worried that they'll die before they get the chance to spend their competition bonuses?"

Those matches aside, what he was most interested in was still the martial fighters themselves.

They obviously had much greater physical strength than the common people, and the Force of Nature seemed to give them some special abilities other than just improving their power or speed.

Each of such abilities would be given a special title which would be promoted as the martial fighter's nickname. For example, in the show Roland was watching, there was a man named Hurricane. His nickname was Mighty Storm, as he could punch numerous times at a super high speed in a second.

Roland was surprised by this propaganda method which would clearly show the trump card of a fighter to his or her opponent before the match began.

He was even more surprised when he saw a demon in this fighting match.

It was a typical Mad Demon which was tall and had big arms. As it wore no mask nor iron gloves, all the audience could see its fangs and three-fingered hands, which were obviously not human features. However, no one seemed to be scared and the commentator referred to him as a foreign martialist.

Roland was amazed by this weird and powerful Dream World again.

To rationalize the existence of the demon devoured by Zero, this world even made it a racial minority. Roland could not help but wonder what would the hybrid demonic beast become in this



world, and then quickly thought of Lifts-her-tail who was full of vigor.

When he heard his own stomach growling, he suddenly noticed that the sun was setting.

He could not help frowning.

Zero usually came back long before this hour.

He had read her diary and knew her school was located at Zhongshan Road. It was only three kilometers from this apartment building. If she took a bus, she could get home in 10 minutes. Her cram school was over at 5:30 pm, but now it was 6:15 already. He got a little worried, "anything happened in her school?"

After a thought, he decided to get out to buy something to eat first.

He thought she might be hanging out with her friends right now. As in a summer day, it was not going to get dark until 8:00 pm, she probably went to a park or some game room to play with her friends.

Given that, even if he came to her school right now, he would probably not meet her there. As her landlord not her nanny, he did not want to be nosy.

She's just a little girl. No matter how hardworking she usually is,

sometimes she may also want to relax.

So I'll cook... no, I'll buy today's dinner for us.

Right at this moment, the image on the TV flickered and the martial fighting broadcasting was changed into The News Studio.

"Good evening, viewers. Now, we interrupt our programs for a newsflash."

Holding a stack of papers in hand and with a worried look on face, the host said, "a No. 29 bus was hijacked at Zhongshan Road. The hijacker had a knife. Now traffic police have sealed the road. We warn all the city residents living in that area to avoid going out for now. We'll broadcast follow-up reports on the most recent progress of the case."

After that, it was swiftly switched to the crime scene on the TV. Roland saw a big crowd gathered outside the police cordon, who showed no inclination to leave.

Wait, isn't this Zero's regular route?

At this thought, his heart sank in a sudden. Is she abducted?

That was not good news to him. He was worried what would happen after the death of a key figure of the Dream World like Zero. Based on his other dream experiences, when subconscious failed to rationalize a thing, it would stop working. To avoid

causing such a trouble to the subconscious, he was even reluctant to delve into Zero's family background.

He was afraid that when the subconscious stopped working, he would wake up and forget everything happened in the dream.

He did not want to finish this dream before he dug out all the information in his deep memory.

More importantly, he would be able to know more about the real world if all the residents of the Apartment of Souls had doors connected to their memory fragments as he guessed.

It was also possible that Zero's death would not change the Dream World, but he did not want to take this risk.

Now that he had this strange power surging inside his body, he decided to go to the crime scene to help.

After he left the Tongzi Street, he ran all the way through the busy roads, feeling a warm flow circulating inside his body. Surprisingly, he did not feel tired and could easily control every part of his body while running at a high speed. He dodged all the pedestrians with agility and arrived at the spot in merely eight minutes. He felt this three-mile long-distance running was like a 100m Sprint.

Out of his expectation, when he finally squeezed himself into the crowd, he found that the hijacker was already captured. In a flood

of tears, he was telling the reporter that he just did this on the spur of the moment. The crowd responded with boos and catcalls and then quickly left. Traffic police began to clean up roadblocks, getting ready to restore the traffic.

With his mouth corner twisted, he complained in his heart, "who says that policemen always come after the problem is solved."

Besides, he did not see Zero in the hijacked bus. He sighed inwardly, "it looks like I've run all this way for nothing."

When he was about to leave, he heard a vague call for help coming out of a narrow lane on the side of the road.

He was startled and looked into the lane. At this moment, the sun did not completely fall behind the mountains, but the lofty buildings on both sides of the lane blocked all the light. It was dark inside. He saw nothing in it.

Was that an illusion?

After several minutes, when he slowly walked past the entrance of the lane, he heard the weak voice again.

There must be someone inside!

I should ask the police for help.

He turned around, only to find that all the policemen had got into their cars with the hijacker and were driving away. It was too late to stop them now.

Should I pretend that I've heard nothing?

However, he clearly felt something inside the lane was attracting him.

The moment he had got near to the entrance of the lane, the warm flow in the body had started to surge. It felt like an uproar or an excitement, which urged him to get in.

He stepped into the narrow lane.

After his eyes quickly adjusted to the very weak light inside, he saw nothing but a man who stood with his back toward him.

"Are you calling for help?" Roland asked, frowning.

The man did not answer or turn around. Instead, he rotated his head 180 degrees to look at Roland. Seeing this movement, he sucked in a breath of cold air.

He was even more shocked seeing the man's face.

With black skin and lots of blisters, it seemed as if it were burnt. A dark red cyclone shining in the dim light was twirling on his

forehead.

# Chapter 661: The Star Cyclone

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"Is this... magic power?"

The twirling cyclone on the man's forehead immediately reminded Roland of Nightingale's description about the form of magic power, but seeing it now for himself, he thought it was more like a galaxy. Several spiral arms were revolving around the nexus, the brightest point which was located in the center. Despite that it was only about a palm size, when he carefully looked at it, he could notice numerous details and felt some surging power in it.

"Are you a martial fighter?" The man suddenly opened his mouth to ask in a hoarse voice.

"No, I'm not." Roland was fully alerted.

"Yeah, I guess so." The burnt-face man turned his body toward Roland without moving his head at all. "You taste sweeter."

Roland looked for weakness in the man's body while saying, "if you were a girl, I might be a bit interested in hearing these words. Are you a man bit by the magic power... no, Force of Nature?"

"Force of Nature?" The burnt-face man snorted contemptuously. "They've no idea where this power came from and knew nothing about its essence."

"Don't talk as if you know everything." Roland retorted.

thinking, "come on, this is my dream!"

The man opened his mouth which was full of bleeding blisters to say, "I can't tell, but I can feel it. It doesn't belong to this world. It's a gift from the deities. I thought the hijacker could attract at least one or two martial fighters to come here, but he surrendered too fast. Fortunately, my efforts finally paid off, as you came here..."

"Crack!"

Roland struck first to gain the initiative before the burnt-face man finished his sentence. This was a trick he had learned from his fighting experience in childhood. He could tell from the way the man acted and talked that he was a dangerous guy. Given that, it was not a wise choice to act after he finished talking.

He straightly punched the man on his forehead, as fast as a flash of lightning. As he found his strength had increased sharply, he did not punch with all his power. However, he still clearly felt the man's bones cracking under his fist.

His strike sent the burnt-face man up into the air.

Meanwhile, the warm flow inside his body began to surge, dancing with joy for such a good start.

The man landed and rolled on the ground until hitting a wall. When he staggered to his feet, Roland came up to launch another attack without any hesitation.



He believed his own judgement, as this was his Dream World.

Moreover, his opponent was obviously not a human being.

When his face bones were broken, he seemed to feel no pain and did not beg for mercy at all. No human being suffering such a sharp pain could react this way.

Roland felt that his mind was clearer than ever before.

The violent warm flow filled his body, but did not make him woozy.

He knew that at this moment, he should beat up the underdog, which was another trick he learned from his childhood fighting.

This time, he hit the man with all his strength.

He punched with no skills as if he was hitting a sandbag, keeping the burnt-face man constantly moving to defend. Apparently, the man did not expect this at all and started flailing as Roland's blows were raining down upon him. Roland soon started to feel that hitting the man was like hitting tofu, as his muscles were torn loose after his arms, sternum and ribs broke. If he were a normal man, he would be dead at this moment.

Roland scolded while giving the man a good thrashing, "You

asshole! Turn your head 180 degrees. You thought you were making a horror movie?"

He was very upset by the fact that as the creator of this world, he had been scared by the burnt-face man when he had seen him in this alley.

"This... is... impossible... Why... I can't use it..." The man's voice changed completely and soon Roland could hardly hear anything he was saying.

"Use what?" Roland noticed that the cyclone on the man's forehead was twirling slower. He tried to reach out his hand to touch it and found that it became somewhat tangible. "You mean this cyclone of magic power?"

"No, don't touch it..."

Roland knew that he must do what his enemy did not want him to do. He held his head down and grabbed the cyclone. When the warm flow in his body began to boil, he tore it down.

Suddenly, the burnt-face man quieted down and collapsed to the ground, paralyzed and lifeless.

The cyclone turned from dark red to a bright color when it fell into Roland's palm. Now it was white in the center and blue on the outside, more resembling a galaxy.

It began to twirl again and quickly left his palm, turning in to a beam of dazzling light. It shot up into the sky, leaving a trail like a silver wire and disappeared after several seconds.

Meanwhile, the warm flow inside his body calmed down, giving him great satisfaction. He felt good from head to toe.

He had completely lost his mind.

He thought that this world might be more complicated than he imagined.

Looking at the dead burnt-face man on the ground, his mouth corner twisted and then he turned away heading for the exit of the alley.

It was dark when he returned to the towering tube-shaped apartment building. A swarm of flying insects attracted by the light in it were buzzing noisily in the corridor.

He fumbled to take out his key and inserted it into keyhole. Before he turned the key to open the door, he heard a burst of rapid footsteps behind it.

Zero opened the door with a frown, but he still saw some worry in her eyes.

"Where have you been?"

"Where have you been?"

They asked simultaneously.

"The cram school added classes today. We'll get a day off tomorrow as some teachers will come to check."

"I had gone to look for you."

"Look for me?" the little girl asked doubtingly.

"Yeah, you didn't come back on time." Roland laughed while rubbing her head and then walked into the apartment.

Three dishes and some soup were already placed on the table, but all the bowls and chopsticks remained neat and clean. Obviously, Zero had been waiting for him to come back.

That was why she had run to the door as soon as she had heard the sound at the door.

Roland sat at the table and said, "Let's have dinner. I'm starving."

Zero stared at him, asking, "Were you worried that I was cheated by some stranger? I'm not a kid anymore. Next time, you can just wait for me at home."

Roland could not help but roll his eyes at this, thinking, "Nowadays, junior high school students are so mature? I remember myself at this age, I was terribly naughty. When I still had some allowance, I would go to the game hall and when I didn't, I would go into the mountains to catch chafers. I would never come home until it was dark. How come this little girl behaves so well?"

He somehow felt a little embarrassed for himself at this thought.

"Oh, you've got a day off tomorrow?"

"Uhm, what?" Zero still seemed a bit annoyed but looked relaxed.

Roland said while eating, "Come to the library with me, I'll buy something for you on the way."

"Buy... What?"

"Well, I bought you some clothes last time, so this time, let's buy some dresses, shoes and pajamas... you have to get something new to replace what you are wearing now." He smiled. "I'll buy you a cellphone. We need to stay in touch in case something like this happens again."

# Chapter 662: The Defensive Line

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Having stayed in the Dream World for two days, Roland saw the grey slated roof of his castle again.

He stretched out his hands, repeatedly bending and stretching his fingers. Except for the strange heat current, he had the same feeling as he had in the Dream World. Luckily, he could take advantage of falling down to get rid of the Dream World, otherwise he could not even tell the difference between reality and fantasy.

" Could the brain simulate such a realistic world?"

Roland could not help feeling confused about that.

Especially the cluster of stars which was particularly like the Magic Cyclone. Even though he had never seen the real look of magic power, if the Force of Nature was shaped based on the magic power, everything in the Dream World should be fuzzy.

Plus the eccentric burnt-face man and the heat current that resonated with the cluster of stars... He suddenly was not sure about his previous presumptions.

He felt like his small brain could not contain such a complex and huge Dream World.

But if the Dream World did not exist in his subconsciousness, where was it?

After thinking hard for a long while, Roland could not find a satisfactory answer.

He shook his head and made up his mind to temporarily put these things aside.

Since he could not figure it out, he thought that he should focus on the more important things.

After he took Zero to the library, he learned a lot of useful design knowledge. Even if he just looked through a book, he could precisely reproduce its content.

One of the books also covered the proportioning and property of some alloys, which could greatly save the test time for Anna and Lucia.

Under such circumstances, it would be less difficult to create the third-generation machine tools used to forge higher precision parts.

Of course, he had to personally instruct the first operational workers.

People in different domains in Graycastle were continuously gathering together in the western region. Some people who had settled down here passed the universal education test and got jobs. Upon thinking of this, Roland felt extremely heartened.

This was a gradual process, but he had paved the way. When Graycastle was unified next year, Neverwinter might have an opportunity to be on the threshold of the industrialization age.

Once they entered the industrialization age, the domain would certainly undergo a tremendous change.

In the afternoon, Karl Van Bate, Minister of Construction, brought the news that Route 67 had been accomplished in less time than that of the Kingdom Main Street. Apart from a shorter distance, the workers had become more proficient in construction.

As they promised before, the batch of workers who had been developed by the Ministry of Construction had been affiliated with the border area.

"Your Majesty, if you don't have any other road-building plans, I'm planning to send them all to construct residential quarters." Karl said, "Though there will be extra salary expenditure, Neverwinter is in urgent need of residential quarters."

Roland also knew this condition. There were altogether about 5,000 people in the construction team, half of whom were busy building new residential communities in order to accommodate the large population which had been persuaded by City Hall to come to Neverwinter from the other cities. Over just one year, the town had been enlarged at least over three times, which did not include the new farming land to the south of Redwater River.



"The road-building can wait." He spread out the map of Border Area and pointed to North Slope Mountain, saying, "I'm planning to build a railway directly connecting the mine and the pier so as to load the coal which comes from the west."

"There is already a road..." Karl suddenly stopped and continued to say, "Are you saying a railway?"

"Yes, a railway or railway track." Roland nodded and said, "It's similar to the orbital transportation system of the mine, but it's made up of steel."

"I see," after a while of thinking, Karl said, "but a railway doesn't need many workers, either."

"It doesn't indeed need many workers to construct a narrowly hardened pavement." Roland smiled but did not point it out. Honestly speaking, he knew that Karl did not understand what he had said at all. In the mine, the coal depended on simple ropes, steam engines and horses to carry the loads outside. But that was not what he thought and it was for more than carrying coal.

What he wanted was trains.

Since its invention, the train had caused tremendous changes for land transport.

And this short-distance railway was an attempt.

It was not difficult to understand the principles of steamed trains, but a railway system was gigantic and complex. Even if Roland did not know how many years it took to test and improve before the train and its supporting facilities were put into practice, he thought that it must be a long process.

"Luckily, I can find the knowledge in the Dream World."

He had been so obsessed with the gigantic trains which stood for industrialization.

No matter how heavily they were loaded, the trains steadily travelled through forests and mountains as they puffed white gas. Black connecting rods drive many wheels to rotate, giving out a rhythmical clang and shortening the vast land to an acceptable distance. Afterwards, no matter what changes had taken place in the driving force, the nature of trains has never changed.

Apart from the hardware facilities, a train also needed driving by a batch of railway workers who should be responsible for their own duties. So it was much more complex than simple steam engines and machine tools.

According to Roland's plan, the railway connecting with the North Slope Mountain and the pier was not only a technological test but a training base for developing the first-generation of railway workers.

"Send 200 people to pave the roadbed towards Misty Forest to the outside of the second city wall." Roland decided.

Karl was anxious, "Your Majesty, but the railway will be exposed to the attack of demonic beasts."

Roland carelessly explained to him, "they have no interest in steel. The railway won't be finished before the Months of Demons. Besides, we won't hide behind the short mud wall next year. Don't you feel that the border area is becoming more and more crowded?"

"You mean..."

Roland pointed to the vast area to the northwest of the Impassable Mountain Range and explained to him, "we should expand the border area to the Barbarian Land where the resources are no less than Graycastle. A thin mud wall is far from enough to defend against the demons."

If the Battle of Divine Will broke out and the demons build the third Obelisk in Tuqaila, the outpost would approach the foot of the Impassable Mountain Range. Hence, it was doomed to fail if they just set defensive lines in the breaches of the western region. If the Witch Cooperation Association could follow a mountain path to the Barbarian Land before, so would the demons to enter Graycastle.

Even though the demons gave up the mountain path, his troops would struggle to deal with a group of flying Devilbeasts who flew through mountains to harass them each day.

"Only if the Impassable Mountain Range became the city wall, would Graycastle be safe."

If the Longsong Cannon were set up on each of the mountain tops, the area covered within the shooting range would be his new town.

There were no rivers in this area connecting to the inner land. If resources such as coal needed quickly transporting to the Barbarian Land, they could only rely on a railway.

"The defense plan of the future is a big project but I believe that you can do it."

It sounded fascinating for any mason to bring the Impassable Mountain Range into the territory of Graycastle. If a mason could build such a city, he would certainly be remembered by history.

"Yes, Your Majesty," Karl said with an excited look.

# Chapter 663: The Spectacle

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"In addition, I intend to build a landmark in the city of Neverwinter," Roland continued to say.

"Landmark?" Karl quickly composed himself after the excitement. "Do you mean an eye-catching architecture such as a monument or a clock tower?"

"You could also call it a spectacle." Karl was without a doubt a top figure in the Mason Guild of the king's city, judging by his quick response to such a new terminology. Roland nodded at first, then shook his head and said, "But I'm not going to build any useless landmark."

After the battle with the church, the First Army suffered serious losses. Although Iron Ax reported that the army's morale was still high, the casualties caused huge grief to the families.

In order to strengthen the confidence of the subjects, especially those who came from out-of-town, he came up with this amazing idea of the spectacle. Some spectacles in history were built entirely to satisfy the lust of the rulers without having any benefit to the builders. Even if this could highlight the power of the state, Roland would not build such a white elephant.

"I plan to build a residential building on the south bank of Redwater River, behind the industrial park."

Karl did not reply as he must have realized that this was no

ordinary building.

Roland was very satisfied with Karl's calmness. "It'll have about 15 floors, with a height of three and a half meters per floor and an overall building height of more than 50 meters. In other words, it's close to the height of the four old city walls of the king's city—was that the biggest project you've ever been involved in?"

Karl gasped. "Your Majesty, this would be the Tower of Babel!"

"I wouldn't consider it the Tower of Babel. It's just an ordinary high-rise building." Roland said laughingly, "It just happens to be suitable as a landmark in this era."

The 15-floor height meant that it would tower over the castle. It would be visible as soon as one entered the city of Neverwinter. It would not only symbolize the power of Neverwinter but also make up for the shortage of housing now. After all, high-rise residential buildings had a higher plot ratio than cottages. This explained why more and more skyscrapers were built in the future.

"Could residential buildings really be built so high?" Karl seemed a bit skeptical.

"This is still far from the limitations of concrete." Roland thought for a moment and said, "I'll personally guide you through it."

Although a change of profession often meant a different field of knowledge, mechanics and structural principles were still

interchangeable. Before coming up with this idea, he already considered many factors: the height might seem alarming, but in fact, it was not. For example, the Pyramid of Khufu which was constructed in 2,000 BC possessed a height of over 140 meters and relied only on the piling up of stones. China also had wooden pagodas with a height of more than 130 meters—as long as the foundation was sturdy enough, the height would not be an issue.

Provided stability would not be affected, future generations minimized the volume of the pillars and walls to reduce the cost of materials. Neverwinter already had a surplus of cement production, hence using it to build a concrete building was a good choice.

It would also be advisable to use a multi-podium and towering building design for the structure. Although that would mean occupying more land, it would also greatly enhance the structural stability and reduce the difficulty of construction.

More columns could be added if stability was an issue. Reinforced steel bars could also help with its quality. As long as the foundation was solid, it would be almost uncollapsible.

The last issue was the casting of the concrete—Roland had already considered it and decided that Maggie and Hummingbird would rise into the sky, while Hummingbird would carry iron cans and pour concrete from the air. This would almost be as efficient as using the pump.

Karl already had experience from building the Witch Building which had the same concrete structure, and this time it was just on

a slightly larger scale. The bamboo tendons and the steel wires would also be replaced by reinforced steel. He was highly confident about this project since he also had the Witch Union as technical support.

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"Time's up. Everyone, please put your pens down." Scroll knocked on the table.

"Phew..." Evelyn let out a deep breath. This meant that the second semester at Border Town... no, the city of Neverwinter, had finally ended. She ultimately managed to catch up with everyone else this year and participate in the final exam.

She kept her charcoal pen and looked around—Anna was still nowhere to be found. According to Wendy, Anna had already reached a mysterious realm. Ordinary people who read her books would only feel dizzy and fall into a deep sleep as if they had depleted all their magic powers.

Candle was also looking at her. When their eyes met, Candle even gave a thumbs up, to signify that she did well at the exam.

Nightingale, who was sitting at the back, still looked dejected. Since the reading and writing tests were scrapped, her scores fell drastically, which made Evelyn quite puzzled. As far as she knew, Nightingale came from a noble background and received her education much earlier than other people. She should have an easier time when it came to learning. Perhaps Nightingale's ability



was too important, hence she was kept busy all day handling tasks for His Majesty, and this, in turn, affected her studies.

After all, Nightingale even fought alongside Lady Ashes as a combat witch. In Sleeping Island, she would be someone that Evelyn could only admire from a distance.

The others seemed both happy and sad. For example, Agatha, Lucia and Lily from the first tier always obtained high marks easily. Learning seemed to come naturally to them. Especially, Miss Agatha was already getting closer to Anna and Tilly. She was also a combat witch, thus making Evelyn extremely envious.

For the remaining few, one could guess from the expression on their faces that Honey, Hummingbird and Echo would come last if there were no mishaps.

Of course, this did not include the new members of the alliance, Paper and Summer—they were still not up to speed, and at the moment they were taught by Teacher Scroll alone.

But Evelyn was most excited about Maggie—looking at the guileless little girl, she could not help but want to laugh out aloud.

There are no multiple choice questions in the test!

Since the previous final exam results, Evelyn remained heartbroken. She thought she was already very close to her goal and did not expect to lose by one point to Maggie.

She even looked for Scroll to check if the results were wrong. In the end, she discovered that Maggie did very well for the multiple choice questions, which proved she failed miserably.

In the coming year, Evelyn spent most of her time on learning.

She was able to display her ability quite quickly. She only needed to go the winery two or three times per week, and it took her less than 10 minutes before she could cast all her magic power. Even when the bar was open later on, it still did not affect her performance.

She never once had a match with the poker trio. When she had spare time while working at the bar, she would always flip open her exercise book to consolidate what she had learned that night. She did not let even her favorite perfume collection affect her learning. Evelyn would go shopping with Candle at Convenience Market only when the new flavor of perfume started selling on the shelves. She did all this in order to achieve the goal she set for herself.

And this time, she was confident about winning!

# Chapter 664: The Mystery Moon Detective Squad

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Three days later, Evelyn got her grades for the final exam.

She scored an amazing 113 points out of 150. This was a very high score, judging from her usual standards.

Since Scroll accompanied His Majesty Roland to the Longsong Area for inspection work, Sister Wendy was the one who told her about the results. She even patted Evelyn on her shoulder and said encouragingly, "Good work. Her Highness Tilly would be very happy when she gets to know about this. Keep up the great work."

"I'll continue to work hard!" Evelyn nodded firmly and turned round to look for Candle. "How many points did you get?"

"91 points, which is still a pass," Candle answered, "Looking at your happy expression, you must have done very well on the test."

"Um!" Evelyn blurted. "113!"

"Really? This score is probably close to Lucia's!" Candle said excitedly, "Would you like me to find out?"

"I don't think so. They must have done better." Evelyn waved her hand. "I only want to know Maggie's result."

"Perhaps my next goal could be replaced by Lily or Lucia," she thought. She was aware her ability was indeed very bad, but she was born like that which was unchangeable. Learning, however, was something that could improve with efforts. Even ordinary people could excel in learning, and hence she did not want to lose to anyone.

She also wanted to be a learned and talented person like His Majesty Roland.

After class, Evelyn found Maggie, but Maggie's reply was unbelievable. "Cuckoo—I scored 117!"

How could this be possible?

She stood there motionlessly for a long time, feeling incredulous even after Maggie left.

"How could this be? Scroll must have made a mistake in her results." For a moment, Evelyn thought she heard her own voice. She blinked, only to realize that the one who had spoken was Mystery Moon. She happened to hear the conversation and had a similar puzzled look on her face.

"What's so strange about that?" Lily stared at Mystery Moon. "Don't doubt the ability of others, just because you fared poorly."

"But I was sitting right in front of her." Mystery Moon tried to justify herself. "When I collected the test, I saw that she drew

honey jerky all over the blank paper."

"Are you sure?" Lily frowned.

"I swear on my electromagnetic force!"

"Hah... that's not in the least bit convincing at all." Lily shrugged and prepared to leave, but was pulled back by Mystery Moon.

"Wait a minute, what I said was all true! Maybe we should investigate."

"I'm not interested." Lily snarled. "If you have any doubts, you can check with Scroll when she comes back."

"That would defeat the whole purpose of exploring, ah," said Mystery Moon with an expression of mischief. "Evelyn, let's help you to find out the truth!"

"Don't count me in!"

"What happened?" Candle called out.

Evelyn hesitated and then revealed her confused thoughts.

"Hmm... what would you do if you wanted to investigate?" Candle touched Evelyn's head and said, "It takes a few days for

Teacher Scroll to return, right?"

"Now that both His Majesty and Nightingale are away, don't think that I'll allow you to sneak into the office." Lily glared at Mystery Moon. "Don't think I'm unaware of what you plan to do."

"Steal the tests? I'm not that stupid." Mystery Moon shook her fingers. "I just want to find out where Scroll marks the tests."

"You mean..." Candle's eyes lit up.

"We just need to call Summer." She smirked.

Evelyn instantly understood Mystery Moon's plan. Summer could replay the illusion where Scroll was scoring the test for Maggie, and the mystery would be solved. "But... Teacher Scroll usually does so at City Hall. Won't it be inappropriate for us to be there?"

"What's wrong with that? In the city of Neverwinter, everyone can easily access City Hall, so there's no reason why we can't go." Mystery Moon shouted. "It's not His Majesty's office, so I think some people should stop worrying unnecessarily."

"I have to remind you," said Lily, "Most people only have access to the lobby of City Hall. The office of the Ministry of Education is on the second floor. Do you think those officials will let us enter?"

"Well, this..." Mystery Moon was at a loss for words.

"In that case, let's forget about it," Evelyn said. She did not want to bother the others. "I'll wait for a few more days."

"No, I have a way around it." Candle pondered as she touched her chin.

...

Candle's method was very simple, which was to involve Nana. According to her plan, since Summer would already be involved, it would not matter if they called another person as well.

And as it turned out, this method did work.

Evelyn was amazed by Nana Pine's popularity. As soon as Nana entered City Hall the next day, she was greeted warmly and stopped by no one. This was probably due to the popular image of the little angel, or the fact that her father was a well-known noble in the Border Area who had been personally praised by His Majesty. Anyway, she entered the office of the Ministry of Education effortlessly.

There was no one in the room.

Few teachers would come here unless there was a meeting.

"We're in!" Mystery Moon said excitedly, "Let's start

backtracking!"

"Are you sure... this is alright?" Summer was a little hesitant. "Only officials are allowed to be here."

"Officials are no different from us. Hummingbird is even the vice minister of the Ministry of Construction," Mystery Moon patted her chest and said, "Don't worry, as long as we don't say anything, Scroll would certainly not mind that we visited her office."

"If I find out that you're lying, I promise I'll tell Scroll," Lily said coldly.

"I thought you said you weren't coming?"

"Hmm... I, I'm here to supervise you and prevent you from making a big mistake, got it?"

Looking at the both of them arguing, Evelyn suddenly felt that her decision might be a mistake.

Finally, Candle managed to persuade Summer. When the illusion appeared in the office, everyone held their breath.

It was pretty clear that the exact time when Scroll marked the papers had to be the day after the exam and before she left for Longsong Stronghold. Summer quickly found the exact scene with a quick flashback.



Everyone quickly squeezed behind "Scroll".

As long as the time had not lapsed for too long, Summer would be able to maintain the illusion for 30 minutes. Soon after, Evelyn saw Maggie's paper.

"Look, I wasn't lying!" Mystery Moon shouted.

"..." Lily could not help but frown.

There was indeed a large amount of blank space on the paper. Other than the easier fill-in-the-blank questions plus the question-and-answer type of questions in front, almost no words were included in the calculation section. Some of the items even had drawings of roasted meat underneath them. Even "Scroll" was shaking her head unwittingly.

It was very clear that this test could not have attained a score of 117.

"Could it be possible that Maggie was lying?" Evelyn thought.

# Chapter 665: Chaos

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"Scroll" quickly scanned through the entire examination paper, then wrote down at the front of the paper the total score of the three subjects: 17.

The result was missing an entire 100 points.

"Well... so the problem lay with Maggie?" Nana tilted her head.

"So, that's the result?" Mystery Moon was greatly disappointed. "So it wasn't Scroll who purposely gave a high score to Maggie in exchange for honey grilled meat—oh!"

Lily slapped the back of Mystery Moon's head, "Shut up!"

"Should we continue to watch?" Summer asked timidly. "We should leave as soon as possible so that we won't get ourselves found out."

"Let's wait for a second," said Candle. "Perhaps something went wrong when it was copied."

"There's no need. I already know the result so it's fine..." Evelyn shook her head. If it were the original method of writing, it would indeed be possible to confuse the figures in a compact arrangement. However, in the universal education popularized by His Majesty Roland, the figures were replaced by simple, easy-to-remember single strokes, so the chances of committing mistakes

were very slim.

"I think it was Maggie who flew in from the window, making the jerky—stop!" Mystery Moon covered her head, "Don't do it. I will stop talking."

They saw "Scroll" check all the papers and begin to copy the scores onto a form. Maggie's column still reflected a score of 17 points.

"The problem really didn't lie with Teacher Scroll," said Candle relievedly.

"Can we go now?" Summer said anxiously.

Evelyn was about to reply, but "Scroll" suddenly stood up and looked toward the doorway. Six people immediately followed her gaze, then they noticed that the door was opened and a town hall apprentice appeared in the doorway.

"What are they talking about?" asked Mystery Moon.

There was no sound in the illusion, so they could only judge the conversation between the two by lip reading.

"It appeared to be Lord Scroll... His Excellency Barov... is sending for you?"

Then "Scroll" nodded, and followed the apprentice out of the office.

The moment the door closed, perhaps because of the air current, a cold wind suddenly picked up within the room. All the papers were blown and scattered messily all over the floor.

"Ah... the window," Lily mumbled.

Evelyn saw it too—the window that was previously closed was now open with a small gap. Scroll did not shut the window tight, and hence the open door generated an air current that forced the window to open. The autumn wind outdoors caused the window to swing back and forth, and open wider and wider. It was not long before a strong wind severely smashed it back to the window frame. Although the sound could not be heard, one could imagine the strong impact from the glass tremor.

Something unexpected happened.

An air current swept through the office again and caused the pen holder to fall on the desktop. The quill that was in the ink bottle suddenly flew up and landed exactly on that exam sheet.

After crossing an arc in mid-air, the tip of the pen dropped on the table, leaving a stroke on Maggie's column and turning the original 17 into a three-digit 117.

Probably someone heard the loud noise coming out of the office,

so the door was pushed open again. That apprentice reappeared to have a quick look around, and then came in astonishedly.

She went to the window, shut all the windows tight, and then crouched to clean up the office for Scroll.

She did not leave until she was satisfied that all the documents had been re-organized and neatly placed on the desk.

"Was this what had happened?" Evelyn and Candle looked at each other.

It was neither Scroll's error in copying the marks nor Maggie's intention to lie but an accident caused by the unexpected wind?

Evelyn was then able to guess what happened next. Scroll received the order of His Majesty to make a trip to Longsong, so she passed the score sheet to Wendy. Wendy was not the person in charge of marking the exams, and even if she was puzzled by Maggie's performance, she would not question Scroll's judgment.

"Ha, under the insistence of Mystery Moon, the truth has finally been revealed," Mystery Moon looked up and said, "the culprit was... Teacher Scroll!"

"It was the wind!" Lily gritted her teeth.

"But if Scroll had closed the window tightly, the wind would not have been able to blow the tests, nor the quill, right?"

"How could you say this!"

"No," Nana said thoughtfully, "in that case, it would have been His Majesty Roland's fault. He built the City Hall here, and not only did he expand it, he also built two more stories. Without this additional second story, Scroll would not be able to mark the papers here."

"Uh... you're right, so the culprit was—His Majesty Roland?"

"Enough, all of you!"

"Excuse me... can I stop now?" Summer seemed like she was about to burst into tears.

"Sorry, that's enough," said Evelyn patting her shoulder. "Thank you, let's go."

"Hey, should we just leave like that? Maybe we can find the next quiz in the office?" Mystery Moon stood in front of everyone to stop them.

"This was the real reason you wanted to come here!" Lily rushed forward, "I will never let you make trouble!"

"I, I was just kidding!"

...

The investigation ended in a farce. After bidding farewell to Candle, Evelyn returned to the Witch Building alone.

Although the truth had come to light, her mood was not calm at all.

Somehow, the flying paper and the falling quill continued to emerge in her mind—both actions were erratic and yet at the last minute formed ingenious and perfect results.

The paper, the pen, the airflow caused by the door, and the time when the apprentice went in and out, all led to this result. Without any one of these conditions, the change of the score could not be achieved.

However, these conditions were unconscious and chaotic.

In that case, this could also be applied to mixing cocktails.

A variety of ingredients are added to the alcohol, but you can't taste each and every ingredient. They are fused in the liquid and affect each other, creating a new taste that can be accepted by people after numerous attempts. Sometimes, a rare combination that happens by chance could also create those unique tastes.

Evelyn could not help but think of the microscopic balls that His Majesty Roland mentioned—they continually make disorderly

disturbances, each of which seemed irrelevant yet could portray marvelous traits.

She closed her eyes and felt that something in her heart was ready to burst out.

The world was full of chaos.

But the results were hidden in the chaos.

As if it were all meant to be.

Evelyn forced her eyes open and reached for the cup on the table.

Ripples appeared in the cold water, and then the color changed as if a drop of paint fell on them. The water gradually turned into a reddish orange, and a fragrance she had never smelled before drifted into her nose.

She hesitated for a moment, then started licking the liquid.

An indescribable sweetness suddenly covered her tongue—slightly bitter, with a strong mellow flavor, that was unmatched by any type of drink.

It was not only like a mixture of fruit juice and milk but also like a mixture of tea and honey. Evelyn could not accurately describe the flavor, but she was sure of one thing.



This was definitely not wine.

# Chapter 666: The Good and Bad News

Translator: TransN Editor: Meh

A week later, Roland returned to the Border Area from Longsong Stronghold.

As soon as he entered the castle, he received two pieces of good news. The first was brought by Barov. "Your Majesty, the astrologers of the old king's city arrived in Neverwinter three days ago. A total of 312 people came including artisans, apprentices, and their families. I've arranged nine astrologers to stay in the Foreign Affairs Building, while the others have been temporarily arranged to stay at the reception area.

"This group of people is finally here," Roland thought for a moment, and then commanded. "Let's hold a welcome party in the square this evening. I want the subjects of Neverwinter to know that there's now another school in the town."

As with alchemy, astrology had a high reputation among the general population. Usually, only the king's city would possess both schools of thought. Now that the Astrology Association was approaching the Western Region, Neverwinter would become more accepted as the new king's city.

However, Roland did not need this school of astrology divination. Instead, he really attached more importance to the astrologer's computing power. For this era, they were absolutely regarded as the forefront of the mathematicians. Both analyzing the calendars and estimating the orbit of the stars needed a lot of

calculations. If they had relevant knowledge of middle and advanced mathematics, they could undoubtedly be better on the previous foundation.

He intended to set up a School of Mathematics to allow these people to devote most of their time to calculating, apart from the occasional observation of the Star of Extinction—in this era where there was no computer, many scholars working together to complete some complex operations was the most efficient choice. Whether it was for laying of railways in the future, constructing large ships, installing Longsong Cannon in the mountains or writing shooting manuals, these all required their help.

"Yes, Your Majesty." Barov nodded, and then asked, "I don't know if your trip to Longsong..."

"I encountered a lot of problems." Roland did not need to conceal anything in front of Barov, the City Hall Director. "The secondary City Hall of Longsong Stronghold has already started to show signs of dereliction of duty and corruption. Scroll has found many fake accounts, and two corrupt men were even arrested from the batch of officials from the Border Area."

At this sentence, Barov could not help but swallow his spittle. "Are they my disciples?"

Roland was amused by the cautious look on Barov's face. He shook his head reluctantly. "Even if they're your disciples, I wouldn't put the blame on you, so you can rest assured."

"Your Majesty is wise," Barov said hurriedly, "So are they the original people from the town?"

"Well, they were the second batch of graduates. After passing the assessment, they entered City Hall and then they were transferred to the Longsong Area with the entire team." Roland sighed. "As of today, it has only been less than a year."

At the moment, City Hall had cultivated a group of semi-leaders. One group came from the Longsong area, which followed the exact model of Border Town. Together with the locals Honeysuckle Petrov, Elk Rene and some minor nobility, they were a well-equipped group, just slightly smaller in numbers.

The other half was a small batch that went to Fallen Dragon Ridge. In addition to assisting Countess Spear to maintain the political situation, their secondary task was to establish a framework for the secondary City Hall.

There were also scholars from the Northern Region that came back with Edith Kant to learn about the management of City Hall. Together with these scholars, Roland could probably make up the other half in a short period of time.

He had already allocated these people to the Southernmost Region.

It was undoubtedly the local officials who could carry out Roland's will who were the rarest of talents.

Without them as the foundation, even if Roland conquered the entire Kingdom of Graycastle, he would not be able to centralize the kingdom's resources quickly—local governments were an important part of the centralization of authority. He could use the witches to promote science and technology, but he could not create a bunch of grass-roots officials from thin air.

The sub-aristocrats would never obey his orders willingly. In the eyes of the feudalists, the only important thing was the small acreage that they occupied.

Therefore, every person who had administrative experience was a rare treasure. After losing a few of them, Roland naturally felt depressed. Despite the inevitable corruption of the organization, he thought that they could persevere for more than a decade. He really did not expect to encounter such a problem in less than a year. The fact that the two corrupt people were born civilians also proved in some ways that once they had the power, they might be more likely to lose their way than the noble.

"Those who violate the law..."

"All have been dealt with severely." Roland conceded. "To set an example for everyone else."

This should help to maintain everything for a few years—Nightingale and Scroll's ability temporarily preserved the integrity of the organization. But he also knew that the situation should be resolved in an alternative method, otherwise, the witches could easily be at risk again. And this time the enemy would come from the internal departments.

"Summon every one of City Hall to gather in the castle hall tomorrow. I'll personally give them a briefing to talk about the importance of discipline and responsibility."

Of course, there were also rewards and punishments—they should know how to choose when faced with the pressures and prospects of the Battle of Divine Will.

"Yes, Your Majesty." Barov bowed.

Looking at the old director's back as he left, Roland was satisfied and had a sip of his tea.

He knew the reason for Barov's loyalty—Barov enjoyed the satisfaction that the power brought whilst chasing power, and also made good use of his power at the same time. Barov was undoubtedly a very suitable person for the new regime. Perhaps in the future of City Hall, only he could contend with Edith.

The second good news came from Wendy.

"Evelyn's ability has been evolved?" Roland was a little surprised when he heard the news.

As far as he could remember, Evelyn's magic indicators were very balanced and did not seem prominent. He was quite surprised that she actually became the first witch on Sleeping Island to evolve.

"Yes... Agatha has confirmed this, but..." Wendy bitterly smiled. "The evolved ability is so weird that I don't know how to describe it."

"Take her to my office," he said excitedly.

...

Evelyn went to the third floor of the castle, together with several glass bottles.

Roland noticed that each bottle was filled with different colors of liquid.

"Her magic power looks like a gray ball..." Nightingale whispered in his ear, "but the shape isn't fixed."

"What's the total amount of magic power?"

"The level of improvement is good. At the moment, she's between Soraya and Maggie."

Roland nodded and looked at Evelyn. "What's inside the bottles?"

"The drinks that I've made with my ability in these days." She seemed a bit dejected. "They taste different, and I absolutely lose control of the last result... The only thing in common is that they all can be drunk."

"Drinks?"

Roland's curiosity grew immense.

He found a few cups and poured himself a glass from each bottle.

When he first tasted the light blue drink, it was indescribably delicious, like a fruit juice mix, but also with a hint of refreshing coldness.

Just drinkable? This is way too good a drink!



# Chapter 667: Chaos Drinks

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The following cups of drinks were real eye-openers for Roland.

Some tasted like coffee, a bit bitter but with an intense exotic fragrance. Some tasted like soup, delicious and having the function to warm stomach. The unique one was that he could not find the corresponding taste in his memory. If he had to name it, Fire Dragon Wine might be the most appropriate.

The wine was not made of pitaya, but something like the imaginary dragon flame. The scorching impact of the first sip was like lava gushing into the mouth, and then a mouthful of a burned scent followed as if the tongue was roasted. The faint taste of succulent fruits finally came, mixed with the light flavor of the wine.

The longer it was kept in the mouth, the longer the aftertaste would remain. It absolutely would be the best drink of the winter.

It was likely that Nightingale saw Roland's intoxicated looks, she could not help but show herself, moistened her lips and asked, "Your Majesty, it really tastes so good?"

"You'll know after you try it." Roland handed her a cup of drink.

Immediately, Nightingale contentedly exclaimed, with her eyes bent into a slit.

"I've tasted it," Wendy said with the same look, "and it's really hard to resist such a delicious drink."

After they drunk all of the Fire Dragon Wine, Roland revealed a little reluctance as he let out a burp. "Is there more drink like this?"

Evelyn shook her head and said, "I can't copy the last drink... The new ability is totally random."

"Can't copy?" Roland was somewhat amazed. He finally understood what distressed Evelyn after Wendy explicitly stated the details of the test.

The ability could turn the fresh water, wine or other liquids into drinks. However, which drink would be the final product was uncontrollable. In other words, the final product each time was totally different.

The consumption of magical power to transform these drinks was much more than that of to transform alcohol. The magic power could only be cast once per day. The quantity of transformed drink was limited, which was equal to the capacity of a barrel. Roland had seen that kind of round barrel in the tavern, which could store about one cubic meter of wine in each barrel.

Until now, Evelyn had just cast the new ability five times, getting five drinks with different tastes.

Roland felt regret at the prospect, not knowing whether he would get the chance to drink Fire Dragon Wine again.

It was possibly the reason that Evelyn felt so depressed.

High awakening could be considered as a rebirth for witches, for they even had chances to upgrade from being a non-combat witch to a combat witch. Although Roland stressed that each witch was of incredible potential, Evelyn, who came from Sleeping Island, still could not change her mind.

Roland knew that Evelyn had no confidence in her brewing technique. She felt far more depressed despite the fact that her new ability upgraded a lot but did not change in essence. Most of the drinks were transformed from wine, and she could not even control what she could make at all.

He had no better ways to change her long-held belief, but it was a matter of time. Roland believed that their state of mind would change as the assistant witches in the city of Neverwinter showed their extraordinary talents.

He held no confidence in saying her ability was useless.

The pursuit of perfume ushered in the Modern Navigation Times, the Silk Road thrived as the porcelains and silk trade boomed, which all served as the evidence to people's demands and desire for luxuries. These drinks, however, would be the true luxuries. The delicious taste and unique experience would inevitably gain popularity among common people no matter which

era they were in, and it even brought a refreshing feeling to this mundane world.

Moreover it was almost cost-free!

For example, it was no surprise that the weight of the Fire Dragon Wine could be converted into the same weight of gold royals if it was sold to the Fjords and other kingdoms.

Because there were always some rich merchants and nobles that could pay for it.

As for the war caused by the desire for luxuries... They should feel gratified that Roland did not scramble for these drinks. Waging war for luxuries to Neverwinter was nothing short of committing suicide.

Admittedly, Evelyn would bring him countless wealth.

And these drinks would not only be used for trade.

He had learned from the past experience that the matters widely popular with people could serve as a bridge for culture and ideology.

Besides, in these hard war times, it could boost morale for those soldiers who were fighting on the outer edge of the Impassable Mountain Range if they could have such drinks delivered from the city of Neverwinter.

He would never reject these kinds of drinks which could enhance cohesion and strengthen the subject's confidence to resist the Battle of Divine Will.

"In addition to the alcohol... in the future, it'll be the transformation of high-grade wines, I'll create a special drink storage building for you," Roland made a decision and said, "You can use your new capabilities to their full potential. I believe everyone who has a drink will be obsessed with it."

"Alright, alright... Your Majesty." Although Evelyn agreed, she was still nonetheless skeptical.

She did not realize her own worth.

Roland did not say aloud what he was thinking. He firmly believed Evelyn would see the changes brought by her power of chaos sooner or later. As long as she kept doing as he required.

"As for the names of these drinks, chaos drinks is okay," Roland said with a smile.

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After the welcome dinner came to an end, Astrologer of Dispersion Star went into the study of His Majesty Roland.

He had successively worked for three King Wimbledons, and Roland Wimbledon was the fourth king he worked for.

But he was also the king whose thoughts were elusory.

Regardless of those rumors about his ridiculousness and flighty behavior from the king's city, the young ruler was somewhat different from the former kings and it was hard to understand what he was thinking. He was neither arrogant nor pretended to be imperturbable, as if, as if his thought was beyond common people's understanding, making him hard to catch up to.

That letter of reply was the best proof.

Dispersion Star had never seen any king who was so indifferent to the news about the Star of Extinction. Part of the content of the letter was greetings, part was to invite Astrology Association to move to the Western Region, declaring that he had the better astronomical telescope to meet the demand for star observation. The end of the letter unhurriedly mentioned that the city of Neverwinter also found new clues about Bloody Moon, and that he needed to discuss it with astrologers.

No surprise, no fear, he stayed calm and read the letter as if he just said "yes, I know" nonchalantly.

In fact, even when Roland first visited the observatory and learned of the existence of the Start of Extinction, he did not act very surprised.

Although it was the blessing that the subject had such a composed king, he still felt downcast because of the finding, also his lifelong pursuit, not arousing much attention.

The study was still brightly lit, and His Majesty Roland was writing something. There were piles of documents on the desk, Dispersion Star had not seen such a scene for a long time.

"My Revered Majesty, good evening," he bowed and said with gratification, "The Astrology Association shows its respect to you."

"Ah... you're here." Roland put his pen aside and beckoned him, saying, "Sit down, I've something to talk to you about."

# Chapter 668: Dispersion Star Astrologer

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"Is it regarding the prophecy of the Bloody Moon?" Dispersion Star sat down.

"Well, that's a part of it. Since you've touched on that point, let's start with the prophecy then." The young king rose to his feet and poured a cup of tea for the astrologer who was totally struck by such an act of condescension. Apparently, Roland was much more easygoing than Timothy.

"With respect to the prophecy of the Bloody Moon, it can be traced back to over 1,000 years ago when there was neither the Kingdom of Graycastle nor the Wimbledon Family."

"But Your Majesty, the records show that our history only dates back to over 450 years ago..."

"The missing part was indeed documented but was later deliberately concealed by someone." Roland switched to a more comfortable sitting position and said, "It's a long story, which I'll need some time to fully explain to you."

What the astrologer heard afterward was inscrutably astonishing.

The story brought him back to the uninhabited Barbarian Land and the Land of Dawn 1,000 years ago when demons and human beings had had a prolonged war of life and death. It talked about the symbolic meaning of the Bloody Moon, the witch empire, the



origins of the Four Kingdoms, as well as that of the church... If it was not out of the mouth of the king, Dispersion Star would definitely condemn the speech and describe it as horrendous and absurd.

Nonetheless, from Roland's expression, Dispersion Star could tell the king was absolutely serious.

After Roland finished the speech, Dispersion Star felt suffocated. He had firmly believed that the doomsday was simply a God's punishment. The shaking seabed, the cracking earth, the underground fire and thunderbolts from the sky, as terrifying as they were, would not completely destroy human civilizations. As long as men got prepared in advance, a great part of cities could still survive these catastrophes.

According to His Majesty, however, the Bloody Moon was a signal of the commencement of the war from demons.

It seemed that the war between human beings and demons had lasted for a thousand years. Men had been defeated twice, and one more, they would be completely eliminated from the earth.

"Your Majesty..." Dispersion Star almost lost his voice. "Where did you learn these?"

Roland stuck out two fingers. "The witch empire and the church. They both have something to do with the establishment of the Four Kingdoms, including the Kingdom of Graycastle. I've actually encountered demons to the west of the Western Region. They

were, veritably, of a foreign race, who have developed their own civilization and built their own armies."

"And... what's the smile of deities?"

"Nobody knows. Perhaps we'll only find out the answer after the Battle of Divine Will."

Dispersion Star fell silent. He was not sure whether he should believe this appalling narrative, but then he soon realized the story connected to the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Graycastle and the thriving of the Wimbledon Family. As the king of the realm, Roland had no reason to lie to him.

There was no point for him to do that.

Suppose everything Roland had said was true, it would then make sense why His Majesty trusted witches so much.

Suppose witches' power did not come from demons, naturally, they would no longer be men's enemies.

In this light, the rumors about the innocence of witches circulated in the old king's city were simply a tip of the iceberg of the truth. Without a doubt, it was pretty wise and cautious of His Majesty to selectively disclose the information and hold back the part that would potentially spark panic among the multitude.

The only thing that Dispersion Star failed to understand was how

the Bloody Moon in the sky bore a relationship to the Gates of Hell.

"Your Majesty, what can I do for you?"

Dimly, Dispersion Star was aware that it was probably not out of any astrological reasons that the king had asked the Astrology Association to move to the Western Region several times. Roland apparently knew much more about the Star of Extinction than any astrologers. If Dispersion Star was not informed of this secret today, he would never possibly know what had happened 1,000 years ago.

"This is what I want to discuss with you next, which may be even more important than the secret I told you earlier," Roland answered with a smile and handed a book on the desk to him. "Take a look at this first."

Dispersion Star took the book and noticed the title on the cover was a combination of phrases he had never seen before.

"Analytic... geometry?"

The word was quite a mouthful. Surprisingly, it was printed in a blue color that could only be produced with very fine and expensive blue pigments.

"Take your time. It's fine if you don't understand. You'll need to learn a lot of things in the future."

Although the lighting in Roland's room was relatively decent even without a candle, it was still not comparable to daylight. As such, Dispersion Star felt reluctant to read the book right away, as late night reading could more or less cause eye damage.

As an astrologer, he should well protect his eyes.

Nevertheless, Dispersion Star did not want to directly decline the king's request and thereby infuriate him. So, he decided to just quickly skim it through and read more carefully tomorrow when there was adequate lighting.

His eyes, however, were glued to the contents after he read the prologue on the first page.

"To describe the orbits of objects with arithmetic formulas? To calculate the entire orbit with only a few key parameters?"

Next came several groups of intersecting straight lines, each of which constituted a coordinate system consisting of four planes. In each coordinate, there was a simple shape. Some were just diagonal straight lines, some a section of a curve, some ovals and others a combination of multiple curves. They looked nothing strange, but Dispersion Star's attention was soon caught by the arithmetic formula next to the circle shape.

"That should be an arithmetic formula," thought Dispersion Star.

The formula contained a plus mark and an equal mark, starting

and ending with the same symbol. Dispersion Star did not have the faintest idea what the formula represented, but somehow he perceived the beauty of it. Every symbol possessed a unique charm and was in perfect harmony with the others.

Although each shape was distinct from each other and by no means display the same type of orbit (for example, a straight line and an oval), there was no noticeable difference between their arithmetic formulas.

An idea suddenly flashed across his mind uncontrollably.

"Is it possible that every shape in this world can be described with a corresponding arithmetic formula?"

The astrologer turned to the second page hurriedly in excitement.

...

By the time Dispersion Star closed the book, his neck was sore. Evidently, it had taken him more than an hour to read the whole book. Meanwhile, Roland appeared to be quite absorbed in his occupation. He was busy drafting the document on the desk and had not interrupted his reading.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty. I..."

"Done?" Roland looked up and smiled at the astrologer. "I bet

there's a lot you don't understand."

"Yes. I don't recall any court mentors have taught you those... those symbols and formulas..." Out of ten court mentors, nine were from the Astrology Association. However, what His Majesty had written had totally blown his mind. "They're very interesting, but I just can't have a good grasp on these complicated formula conversions."

"That's because you haven't learned equations. You've got to learn this in order to comprehend analytic geometry." Magically, the king produced a stack of books from the desk and presented them to the astrologer, the titles of which were either in blue or green. All of the titles sounded weird and mouthful.

Dispersion Star's hands started to tremble. "Can I take them back home?"

"Certainly." Roland nodded. "Actually, I want not only you but also all the astrologers and the students in the association to learn them." After a pause, Roland continued, "The second thing I want to let you know is that you don't need to worry too much about the Bloody Moon. Once you fully understand everything in the books, the Astrology Association can play an irreplaceable role in the war against demons. These books mean to simply enlighten you. There'll be something more profound and difficult coming next. By that time, you'll not only be able to calculate the orbit of a moving object, but also that of every tree and every stone on the earth, every star in the sky, everything that you see on this planet. How does it sound like? Are you willing to accept the challenge?"

"Yes, I'd like to, Your Majesty!"

Astrologer of Dispersion Star gave an affirmative answer immediately, now completely elevated from the dejection he had sunk in when Roland had ignored his discovery of the Star of Extinction.

He now foresaw thousands of stars moved along the paths he calculated.

The young king, in the meantime, smiled. The smile was so strange that it reminded Dispersion Star of a hunter who watched an animal slowly falling into his trap.

"Awesome. But please don't be discouraged. It's going to be hard, and it's perfectly normal that you come across some obstacles. I believe you'll eventually get the hang of them."

# Chapter 669: Diplomatic Turmoil

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No. 76 had gradually taken Denise's place since becoming Yorko's maid.

It did not mean that Yorko forgot about his old lover. The truth was that he had to spend some time taking care of his poor guide. In fact, Yorko had been totally shocked when No. 76 had been sent back by her superintendent Silvermask the other day. The punishment had been indeed as severe as "Black Money" had earlier claimed. There had been whip marks and bruises all over her body, and she had looked nothing like the girl he had met half a day ago.

Yorko was happy that he had made the request to retain No. 76 as his maid in a timely fashion. Otherwise, the girl would probably be wrecked by the battery. That was why Silvermask had said she could no longer be a guide, for customers definitely would not want a disabled girl to serve them.

Fortunately, No. 76 was not as fragile as most girls. She had a pretty strong body, especially her abdomen and back, on which several faint muscle lines could be detected. She had quickly recovered from the injuries after medication and was now able to run errands for the household, which, of course, also included some personal services.

For example, the service like she provided today.

"Sir, do you want me to massage your shoulders?"



After No. 76 cleaned the house, she drew close to Yorko smilingly. Although according to general rules, maids were not allowed to approach their masters without permission, No. 76 was apparently still employing the old method she had learned from "Black Money" to please her "guest". Yorko did not feel offended in the least. On the contrary, he liked the flirty way she communicated with him.

If No. 76 was simply a maid who strictly followed rules and obeyed his orders, it would be a little too boring to his taste.

"Come and sit here." Yorko put down the anecdote book in his hand and lay down on the recliner. No. 76 took off his shoes and sat on her knees so that Yorko could rest his head on her thighs comfortably.

She then started to slowly massage Yorko's shoulders with her five slender fingers. Apparently, No. 76 had received professional training, for she used much greater strength and applied more techniques than other ordinary massage girls, who usually flirted with Yorko in the guise of massage. The labor delivered by No. 76 really worked and made Yorko feel less stressed.

Yorko could clearly see No. 76's countenance when he lay on her thighs. After "Black Money" had sent her over, she no longer needed to wear that copper mask to conceal her identity.

Frankly speaking, No. 76 was never a beauty. Her overall appearance was just a little above average and certainly could not

compare to witches. Nevertheless, Yorko liked her red, plumped lips in particular. When he looked up at her, he was always aroused by the faint smile lingering on her lips.

In comparison, her toned body was more appealing to Yorko. It was actually Yorko's first time to see a woman's body full of such incredible strength. Unlike corpulent noble ladies or scrawny peasant girls, No. 76 had well-proportioned limbs, beautiful skins, a prodigal projection of bosom and a flat tummy. When her body tensed up, Yorko could sense her bulging muscles underneath. As a man who always sought thrills, he was more drawn to a perfect body like this than simply a delicate face.

When Yorko was about to take the next step, the door was flung open.

It was Hill Fawkes.

Yorko let out a sigh of disappointment. It appeared his leisure time for today was over. He erected himself and asked, "I hope you aren't asking me to save some witches again."

Hill did not respond but simply eyed No. 76.

The girl soon took the hint and withdrew respectfully.

Yorko shrugged. "You're being overcautious. She's just a servant."

"You'd better remain vigilant these days when the current situation in the Kingdom of Dawn is yet to be optimistic."

"Denise is more reputable than No. 76, and she's from a more distinguished family. Why don't you keep your eyes peeled for her?"

"Because Denise Payton is a public figure, whose background was no hidden secret. You can get the information about her one way or another, but there's no way whatsoever for you to check the background of a guide trained by 'Black Money'." Hill seated himself opposite Yorko and placed a letter on the coffee table between them.

"But I feel I've already known what kind of person she is and where she's from now." Yorko smiled triumphantly. "Do you care to hear it?"

"Oh, really?" Hill's brows went up a fraction of an inch. "Surprise me."

Yorko grinned. He was satisfied to know that the guard appointed by his old friend appeared not be omniscient after all. "It takes a lot of time to train a perfect guide. It'll at least take 10 years to perfect her pillow skills and tone up her body. Those skills she obtained from years of training have already become a part of her, and it has become so natural to her to please and serve her customers. How old is she now?"

"Around 21 or 22... No more than 25."

"Correct. That means she was only a five or six-year-old kid when she started her training. Unless she's a monster who never ages or dies, she can't be a person outside 'Black Money.'" Yorko spread out his hands. "There's no conflict of interest between us and 'Black Money'" anyway. They conduct much dirtier businesses than trafficking slaves and protecting witches, not to mention that we haven't actually managed to protect a witch yet." Yorko went on with self-mockery, "I don't think witches need protection from us."

Yorko was in a very complacent mood when he saw Hill Fawkes remain silent. His self-satisfaction, nonetheless, soon disappeared a minute after he opened the envelope and unfolded the letter.

It was an official diplomatic letter signed by King Roland.

The content of the letter made Yorko quiver in terror.

The King of Graycastle intended to stop the King of Dawn persecuting witches? Yorko was overwhelmed by the unexpected turn of the event. This was the capital of the Kingdom of Dawn, not the Western Region of the Kingdom of Graycastle!

Was his old friend under the impression that Appen Moya would listen to his counsel?

The series of threats following seemed to be even more ridiculous. Roland advised the King of Dawn not to go against the stream and warned him that the ruling of the church, which was starting to decay, provided the best example. He also stated that

the Kingdom of Graycastle would not stand by and would take next step if necessary. Roland hoped that Appen could use his best judgement in all situations.

Although the letter was phrased very politely, Yorko believed everybody in the palace would be sensible enough to sniff out the threatening voice between the lines. Roland was obviously indicating that the Kingdom of Dawn would be his next enemy if their king refused to follow his suggestion.

How could he say that to the King of Dawn directly?

Yorko returned the letter to Hill sullenly. All his contentment faded into restlessness.

Hill was right. To His Majesty, witches were more important than the alliance. He wondered, however, what else these threats would bring about other than growing repugnance among great nobles in the Kingdom of Dawn. The letter could be nothing but another conversation piece.

"What should I do?" It appeared that he had no choice but to rely on Hill's counsel.

Hill took a quick glance at the letter and replied, "Do as His Majesty says. This is your duty as an ambassador. As to the consequence, I bet the worst scenario would be that Appen Moya expels you from the court in rage. You won't run into any danger."

"Then we'll be done with these nobles." Yorko said gloomily, "People in the city of Glow will regard us as crazy and laugh about it in their cups, and Roland will become their new topic of discussion... What will His Majesty benefit from such a bluff?"

"A bluff?" Hill neither agreed nor disagreed. "Do you really think it's a bluff?"

Yorko's heart suddenly stopped beating with a jerk. He looked at the guard in dismay. "No... that can't be..."

Hill said slowly, "Timothy Wimbledon also thought so before the old king's city fell. Based on what I know of His Majesty, he never wastes his time."

# Chapter 670: The Sad Ambassador

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Yorko requested to present himself on the court meeting the following day.

As the two kingdoms had just formed an alliance, his request was soon approved, and two magnificently armored knights escorted him to the palace hall.

Over the past two to three months, Yorko had made numerous vain attempts to see King of Dawn. He wished now, however, that King Appen could have ignored him like he had usually done.

Unfortunately, the reality was always cruel.

By the time he entered the hall, the court meeting was close to its end.

The young king was leaning against his throne, talking animatedly with the ministers. He did not sit up until Yorko bent his knees. "Please rise. I've heard you've brought a letter from Roland Wimbledon?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Yorko answered mechanically. "He congratulates on your coronation and has expressed his earnest desire that the two kingdoms will establish a long-term relationship of cooperation and friendship."

Appen Moya smiled. "That sounds something new. Did he send

any presents?"

"Well, of... course." The Ambassador revolved his reply rapidly in his mind. "The fleet carrying those presents are currently on the way. The letter was actually delivered by post horses."

"I remember when King Wimbledon III was crowned, my father sent a delegation of 200 people to celebrate his coronation. There were 11 wagons full of presents, including goldware, fine wines, silk as well as pretty maids. I'm very curious about what Roland would gift me as a return."

The ministers in the hall burst into a fit of laughter.

Yorke swallowed hard, completely having no idea how to shoot back an answer. He doubted the validity of the story and wondered why Roland had not said anything about presents in the letter. As an ambassador, he had a good reason to be ignorant of the matter. However, for Roland, he should have known the gift-giving etiquette.

"Did he say anything else?" Appen asked.

For a second, Yorke wanted to excuse himself. Yet when he weighed the consequence of such an act, he forced himself to stay put. The outcome of infuriating King of Dawn would be no more than being shut out by nobles in the king's city. If he disappointed Roland, however, he would probably be relieved from the position as an ambassador.



Yorko ground his teeth. "His Majesty... um... also hopes that you stop persecuting witches and treat them as free peoples. Otherwise, the Kingdom of Graycastle would have to employ force to settle the matter, just as what they did to the church."

The hall was deadly silent after he finished.

The ambassador felt sweats started to bead on his forehead.

After quite a while, Appen Moya broke off. "Did Roland Wimbledon really say that? Give me the letter."

A knight approached Yorko at once and snatched the parchment from him.

Yorko could sense the coldness in King of Dawn's tone even without looking at him.

He was almost about to wail at the thought of the lengthy condemnation and warns in the letter.

As he expected, Appen threw the letter to the floor straight away after reading it. The young king obviously had a hard time controlling his temper. He rose to his heels and growled in a red rage. "So this is the attitude of the Kingdom of Graycastle to its ally? Witches are innocent, so we have to set them free? Rubbish! Look at what those damn witches did to House Moya. They invaded the palace, killed the guards and took my father as their hostage to force me to yield to the church! If they didn't poison my

father, he should have been right here, alive and well!"

"But he's dead, and it's his death has made you the king." Yorko left the remaining word unsaid.

"Your Majesty, please calm down. As far as I know... witches trained by the church are different from innocent ones, just as there're good and bad ones among ordinary people..."

"Shut up!" Appen hollered. "You don't have the faintest idea how vile these people in possession of demons' power are. Even God's stones fail to stop them! Tell me then. How could it be possible that such a community, which is literally bounded to nothing, submits to our ruling? The Kingdom of Dawn will be more peaceful without witches. I have to fulfill my obligations of protecting my people!"

Looking at Appen's purple face, Yorko realized reasoning would no longer work. The shadow of his father's death was still haunting him. Although Appen was of about the same age as Roland, he was almost as petulant as the old Roland back in the king's city, and perhaps even worse.

In merely a year after Roland had left the king's city, he had become the real sovereign of the state. Appen, on the contrary, was still acting the boy.

"I'll write a letter to the King of Graycastle and advise him to be vigilant about the Fallen. It's just ridiculous to threaten the Kingdom of Dawn because of those Devil's minions!" Appen paced

back and forth indignantly. "It's true that the Kingdom of Graycastle is powerful. but don't forget who bestowed him such power! Without the support of local nobles, Roland couldn't garrison his troops in here! If he invades our royal domain out of such absurdity, he'll suppress his feudatories in the same way he treats us. By that time, neither my people nor nobles in the Kingdom of Graycastle will support him like they always did when he battled against the church!"

"Well, It appears that Roland has already weeded out the nobles." Yorko thought to himself. He did not really know how His Majesty had defeated the church, but he dimly remembered that Roland had not relied on any nobles when conquering the king's city. At that time, out of the entire Kingdom of Graycastle, few people had believed that Prince Roland Wimbledon would have eventually won the game of thrones. All the great nobles had later been rooted out during the trial, which was why he could get this job as an ambassador.

In the end, Yorko was ordered to leave the palace by Appen Moya just as Hill had anticipated.

Fortunately, none of the ministers in the court chimed in. They were simply too dumbfounded to utter a word. This was better than what Yorko had expected.

But Yorko was pretty sure that after they read the letter on the floor, they would dismiss it with a laugh.

As soon as Yorko returned from the palace, Otto Luoxi paid him a visit.

"King Roland really views this matter in this way?"

"Do I sound like I'm lying?" Yorko collapsed in the recliner. "Well, are you mocking me now?"

"No... I just think Appen's new policy is rather thoughtless. He does want civilians in the Kingdom of Dawn to have a peaceful life, but the hunting measures he takes actually terrifies people."

"Then you should talk him out of it."

"He doesn't listen..." Otto smiled bitterly. "He acts like a different person every time we talk about witches. You can't blame him though. If you witness what happened in the palace..." Otto bit his lip. "No, nothing. The death of the late king greatly shocked Appen. Technically, he shouldn't have ascended the throne until he comes of age five or six years later. I've heard King Wimbledon III was also killed by the witch from the church? If only Appen can be as composed as King Roland."

Yorko gazed at Otto in surprise. He felt like Otto did not sound like the eldest son of one of the three major families in the Kingdom of Dawn but a noble from the Kingdom of Graycastle. Had Roland become so invincible that he could now make nobles in the neighbor country stand on his side?

"Anyway, I'll try to talk to Appen again. He doesn't even listen to Earl Quinn now."

Otto was about to take his leave after the tea when No. 76 suddenly darted into the room.

"Sir... the witch you purchased has come back!"

# Chapter 671: A Turbulent Situation

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Yorko lamented in silence.

"Hell, didn't they agree not to meet each other ever again? It's just a courtesy to say 'please feel free to contact the ambassador if you come across any difficulties'!"

He exchanged a look with Otto. After hesitating for quite a while, Yorko said, "Send her in."

If it was not because the real buyer was here, Yorko would rather make up some excuses such as "The ambassador was currently not available. Please come again later" and shut her out.

No. 76 soon led the girl to the room. As he had expected, it was the 10th item in the "Black Money" auction, Amy.

The witch grasped Yorko's arm anxiously as soon as she came in. "Sir, please help us. Annie and the others are in danger!"

"Danger?" Yorko feared that it was not a good sign. "Slow down, slow down. Take a seat first." Yorko patted her on the shoulder. "Tell me what exactly happened?"

"We've... been found!" Amy uttered a series of broken words breathlessly. "A large number of... patrol team surrounded the orphanage and blocked off the roads in the vicinity. I saw more than one platoons of knights... They're searching for witches one

block after another. The other witches are still stuck in there... Please, help them!"

"Are there other witches apart from you and Annie?"

"Yes, Hero and Broken Sword. Hero lost her legs, so Annie has to carry her on the back."

Yorko gasped. One was already enough for him to worry about, and there were four! "How did you escape?"

"Our food is running low, so I went out to buy some groceries. By the time I came back... by the time I came back, they had been everywhere!" Her voice trailed off into a barely-suppressed sob.

Yorko found himself in a very difficult position. Although titled with Ambassador of Graycastle, he did not have any actual executive power. Therefore, it was impossible for him to stop the patrol team. Further, the operation was commanded by the King of Dawn, whom he had just vexed a great deal during the court meeting. If he now stood out to protect the witches, he would probably face a more severe consequence than being expelled from the palace.

"Don't worry. They'll be OK." No. 76 consoled Amy while gently stroking her back. "Sir Yorko must know how to bring them back safe and sound."

"Not at all!" Yorko snapped in silence. If Amy could have sought

Roland for protection as he had suggested earlier, nothing of these would have happened.

"What about that Mr. Hill?" Otto questioned.

"I don't know. He never reports to me, and often time I can't find him anywhere." Yorko frowned. "If you want to see him, I'm afraid it has to be after dinner."

"I see... I'll look for Earl Quinn first. He's the king's prime minister and is in charge of the patrol team. Perhaps he can help them escape."

"Hang on. Will he listen to you?"

"I've no idea, but it's worth giving it a shot." Otto gave a look full of mixed feelings. "Do you still remember the witch friend I talked about earlier? Her name is Andrea Quinn. She's the daughter of Earl Quinn."

...

Time slowly slipped away. Yorko could do nothing other than looking out of the window while waiting.

Meanwhile, No. 76 did an amazing job in comforting Amy. The agitated girl finally calmed down and fell asleep in the recliner. Yorko could tell that the long journey had cost the witch a great amount of energy. Having said that, it was still pretty... gullible of



her to sleep at a place like this.

By evenfall, Hill Fawkes was back to the ambassador mansion.

"Where did you go..." No sooner had Yorko finished his sentence than he found three people followed Hill to the room.

Actually, it was two and a half people.

One of them was even half a head taller than Hill, her face stained with blood and her bright eyes observant. It was the same Annie who had taken away Amy from "Black Money" the other day. She was carrying a purple-haired girl on her back. Out of convenience, the girl was closely attached to Annie with two straps clutching her waist and her shoulders.

From the dangling pants, Yorko knew she must be legless Hero.

The person who entered last was about the same height as No. 76. She had shoulder length silver hair, gaunt and frail, with her hands at the waist, as though she had sustained severe injuries.

Awakened by the patterings of footsteps, Amy was stunned for a second before throwing herself to Annie. "You all escaped... Thank God! Did those knights hurt you?"

"I'm fine, but Broken Sword... She consumed a lot of magic power."

"I've been so worried about you..." Amy could not hold back her emotions anymore and broke out into tears.

"Annie's here. Nothing to fret about now." Hero offered her solace.

Yorko gaped. "How did you meet them?"

"It's a long story. They must leave here as soon as possible." Hill grabbed the ambassador's hand and pulled him aside to the bedroom. "Listen, you guys must leave the city of Glow before the city gate closes. Our wagons are ready, five in total. The first two will carry wheat and fruit, and you'll get on the other three..."

"Hold on for a second," Yorko interrupted. "You just said... 'you guys'?"

"You and the witches, not including me." Hill stressed each word with due strength. "In order not to obstruct His Majesty's plan, we have to keep in touch with the Kingdom of Dawn."

"But I'm the ambassador!"

"That's exactly why you need to leave." In a critical moment like this, Hill appeared to be even more self-collected than usual. "Look, I didn't save these three witches."

"What?" Yorko was shocked. "Not you?"

"My birds are always hanging around the Tourney Square. If I can't find the witches, it would be a better idea to see how my rivals locate them. I received the news right after the knights set out. Unfortunately, by the time I got there, the block had been under a siege. Only Rats from the Black Street know how to get in there."

"So you bribed the Rats?"

"I've been keeping in contact with local Rats since I arrived at the Kingdom of Dawn. Although it has cost a big chunk of money, they do sometimes help me in the event of a crisis." Hill said in a low tone, "But the three witches had already fled by the time I found their traces with the help of the Rats."

"Isn't that perfect? I'll ask Denise to get them out of here. Let's pretend nothing has happened..."

Hill shook his head. "It isn't that simple. The King of Dawn already knew where the hiding place of these witches exactly is. He has manpower sufficient enough to turn the whole block inside out. How did they escape? There's only one possible explanation: they let the witches go. Perhaps Appen wants to expose more hidden witches in this way... or rather—he wants to find out the person who supports them."

Yorko swallowed hard.

"If that's indeed the case, it would be too risky to linger in the city of Glow. The best option is to leave as soon as you can." Hill continued, "If you can bring four witches to His Majesty, the payoff of that would be significantly greater than fulfilling your duties as an ambassador."

"What about you..." Yorko asked hesitantly. "If you get caught..."

"They can arrest a person with a legit name, but not a nameless man who secretly hides in the darkness. In their eyes, I never exist." Hill chuckled. "Nobody will ever notice one guard in the delegation is missing, and Lord Otto will also cover for me. Do you remember what I said? I'm just an ordinary acrobat. Next time you and His Majesty visit the Kingdom of Dawn, you'll probably see a brand new acrobatics troupe in this prosperous city of Glow."

...

# Chapter 672: Hero

Translator: TransN Editor: Meh

At length, Yorko followed Hill's advice. In the golden glow of sunset, their coach departed the city of Glow.

All the coachmen worked for Hill, who were said to be former employees of the acrobatics troupe. After transporting slaves with the caravan for several times, they had known the retreating route by heart. The fleet did not slow down until the sun completely disappeared behind the mountains. They still, nevertheless, continued with the procession for about two hours after night fell with the help of an oil lamp before pitching their tent in the wilderness.

The coaches arrayed in a circle around a bonfire. A young man who called himself Clown quickly fetched some water and started to make porridge. A tall guy named Rockhill went to feed the horses. The magician was responsible for patrolling and putting out sentries and Chom Brothers setting up booby traps... These people were more like members of an army than of an acrobatics troupe.

Yorko found he did not need to do anything other than waiting for the delicious porridge to be served to him.

Apart from the porridge, he also got a plate of bacon and an apple.

He now understood why Hill had decided to include wheat and fruit in their cargo.

The food in the two wagons, the so-called "goods for sale", would suffice to feed all of them throughout the journey even if they had to commute for one to two months.

Yorko wondered if Hill had prepared to flee the Kingdom of Dawn long before, for it had not taken him a considerably long time to load all the food. He had heard from his guards that Hill had kept in touch with Black Street Rats. "Jesus... Is that guy really just an acrobat?"

Yorko resolved to ask his old friend about it after he returned to the Kingdom of Graycastle.

All the coachmen strode off with their porridge and stayed at the outer-ring respectfully, leaving Yorko, No. 76 and the four witches in the circle.

"I apologize for what I said and did the other day," Annie said cordially. "You didn't hand us to the King of Dawn, but I still can't fully trust you."

"Why?" Amy looked confused. "He doesn't look like a bad man."

Yorko blushed at this compliment, as he had never considered himself a good man. Fortunately, the flush was so faint compared with the light of the bonfire that nobody perceived it. "Ahem, I

reckon that Miss Annie still feels suspicious of the simplicity of the witch organization in the Kingdom of Graycastle."

"Simplicity?"

"For example, some powerful nobles love to keep some witches and use them as their playthings..."

"That's just one of my concerns," Annie interrupted. "Whether it's in Wolfheart or Graycastle, all such organizations will be essentially the same if they intend to lure and abuse witches with lies. If the one in Graycastle does operate in the way you claimed, I'll certainly make a formal apology to you."

"It doesn't matter to me." Yorko shrugged. "My task is to bring you to King Roland. What happens next doesn't have anything to do with me. Even if you want to apologize to me, you may not have a chance to see me in the future."

There was an awkward silence. For a second, no audible sounds could be heard except the "crack, crack" of the bonfire.

Yorko was usually very good at socializing and making conversations. He did not feel like talking, however, with these witches. They had not only disturbed his peaceful life as an ambassador but had also put the emissary delegation in a risky position. There was nothing wrong about being cautious, but the fact that his every single act was under scrutiny really irked him.

In the end, No. 76 broke the silence.

"Are you all from the Kingdom of Wolfheart?" she asked. "Amy told me that you've known each other for quite a while."

Annie nodded. "You're correct, although... we weren't born in the same city."

"Wolfheart is now taken by the church. You've certainly suffered a lot on the way to the Kingdom of Dawn." No. 76 stooped over and touched Hero's dangling pants. She asked in a low voice, "Did she lose her feet during her escape from the church?"

Hero bit her lip bitterly, head lowered.

"They were chopped off by the people she aimed to protect." Annie's answer surprised everyone. "Hero stood out when Wolfheart City encountered the biggest crisis in the history of time, but all she got was hatred from its people."

"Hurt by... the people she protected?"

Annie nodded. "I can explain to you if you want to know. But it isn't a happy story."

No. 76 gazed at Hero for a moment and replied in a serious tone, "I want to know."



Yorko pricked up his ears, though he pretended to be fully absorbed in the bacon he was eating.

"When the church army attacked Wolfheart City a year ago, they threw a large number of bodies infected by the demonic plague into the city, in an attempt to bleed off the strength of the king's city, just like what they did at Broken Tooth Castle," Annie added two more twigs to the bonfire, which soon splintered up into glitters of sparks. "But Hero stopped the demonic plague from spreading with her ability. She could transfer the disease to other living creatures. That was why the plague got under control."

"What kind of living creatures?"

"Rats, cats, dogs, cows, sheep, etc... also including human beings," Annie replied slowly. "Citizens dug a huge hole at the slum. People who got infected would gather there and ask Hero to transfer their disease to animals. They would then burn the animals in the hole. Gradually, people started to view Hero as the lifesaver of Wolfheart City and began to call her Hero. Amy and I also received her treatment."

"But things turned for the worse. A large animal was enough to bear the disease from five or six patients, whereas cats and dogs could only bear one or two. As the church continued to spread the demonic plague, even if people of Wolfheart could catch all living creatures, it would not be enough for all patients. They just couldn't save everyone."

"As the war prolonged, people started to lay their eyes on men."

The word made Yorko feel chilled to the bone.

No. 76 drew close to Hero and gently pressed the witch to her bosom. "That wasn't your fault."

In the flickering light, Annie's face was masked with ice. "Of course it wasn't her fault. Those people never gave her a chance to choose from the beginning. First, they burned prisoners, criminals and volunteers. Then they started to burn the elders, wounded soldiers, and captives from the Judgement Army."

"But Hero didn't do what these crazy men asked her to. She just couldn't kill innocent people, especially those soldiers who yearned for life and minors who had yielded. So, the attitude of the public toward her changed. People started to believe that she colluded with the church and were protecting their enemies. The savior had thus become a traitor. Hero was later imprisoned. If it were not because of her ability, she had probably been sent to the gallows long before."

"Afterward, the church launched another attack. It only took them one day to seize the city wall of the king's city. On the day the city fell, the jailer, who had once been treated by Hero, chopped her legs off with an ax and then set the cell ablaze. He argued that the fall of the Kingdom of Wolfheart was the result of the collusion between Hero and the church. He said as a traitor, Hero couldn't go anywhere but should be burned and destroyed together with the city."

At these words, Annie fell into a short silence. "But the jailer never anticipated that Hero, who lost the ability to move, would be saved by captives from the Judgement Army in the cell."

# Chapter 673: A Sacrifice

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Would church believers save a witch?

Yorko did not realize that he had already forgotten about the bacon and had been all ears as Annie continued with the story.

"They helped Hero out of the cell. With their help, Hero successfully escaped the search from the church. After the war, the survived Judgement Warriors even provided her with food and clothes for a period of time, until their army returned to Hermes and they had to bid farewell. Before they departed, all the Judgement Warriors who had been imprisoned in that cell expressed their gratitude to her."

Yorko knitted his brows. "But regarding the title 'Hero', could it be..."

"She's a hero." The whip was in Annie's voice again. "No matter how the citizens who received her treatment look at her, she did save thousands of people in Wolfheart City, including me and Amy. She deserved such a title."

The ambassador let out a sigh. He had not known that witches suffered far more than he had imagined. If he were unfairly treated in that way, he would view everyone as his enemy and kill all of them to avenge himself, and certainly would not trust anybody.

Yorko's indignation for being under constant suspicion gradually dissipated.

"Her legs... can probably be healed."

"Really? Are you serious?"

"What should we do?"

All the eyes rested on Yorko in a second, including Hero's. She could be no more than 18 or 19 years old by her look. Although misfortunes had weighed down upon her, she had not been devastated by all the snares and toils she had been through during the war. Her eyes were still full of hope instead of numbness and confusion.

"Ahem, I'm not sure." Yorko rubbed his nose. "Hill once said there're over 300 witches in Graycastle. Their power of the devil... No, I mean their abilities should vary, right? Perhaps somebody can regenerate amputated limbs or even grow a new one."

"300?" No. 76 exclaimed in surprise. "How did the King of Graycastle get so many witches?"

"It's a long story. My old friend is a born king. He saw through the church's scheme a long time ago. Not only does he allow witches in his domain to live a normal life, but he also insists on the innocence of witches and advertises this concept throughout Graycastle. Gradually, more witches turn to him for protection and work for him." Yorko took this opportunity to lavish praise on Roland. "So you don't need to worry about your future life at all. His Majesty claims that everyone in Neverwinter will be suited to a

job, including witches."

"What kind of jobs?" Amy's eyes were glistening.

"How should I know... I haven't been to Neverwinter," Yorko thought to himself. "Um, naturally, it depends on your ability. For example, if you can manipulate flames, you can be a blacksmith. If you can conjure whirlwinds, you can work at a mill to activate windmills, something like that." Yorko rambled. "Anyway, His Majesty is planning to build a new king's city in the Western Region, and he certainly needs people. Even if your ability can't help with anything, you can still work as an ordinary person."

"Sounds pretty good indeed." Annie eyed Amy who apparently wanted to voice out. "But lies always sound better than reality. At present, I..."

"I got it. I got it. You haven't fully trusted me yet, right?" Yorko spread out his hands. "Then trust your own eyes when you get there."

"By the way, how did you know Hero?" No. 76 put in.

"When Wolfheart City fell, I happened to live at Amy's place. I noticed the curious behavior of the Judgement Army soldiers', so I followed them and discovered Hero," Annie answered while fiddling with the bonfire. "We met Broken Sword several months later. She was caught by church believers who garrisoned there and was to be sent to Holy City. I ambushed the unit who escorted her and thus saved Broken Sword."

"You alone?"

"If I'm fully prepared, it actually isn't any harder to raid a group of soldiers than a pack of animals," Annie said placidly. "After that ambush, however, the church intensified their searching operation by several times, and we had nowhere to hide. So we joined refugees and left Wolfheart. We went all the way to the south until finally settling down in the orphanage in the city of Glow."

"What a dramatic escape." No. 76 commented with a sigh.

"But it's far from the end," Yorko thought, "Although the hunt by the Kingdom of Dawn isn't as nerve-racking as the one by the church, the number of the armies running after them is more than enough to kill them all." Yorko hoped that all Hill's concerns were just groundless fears, otherwise Appen Moya would never set them free. As long as they were still within the territory of the Kingdom of Dawn, they were not considered to be safe.

He shook his head to put these annoying thoughts behind. "Let's finish the dinner and sleep soon. We have a long journey ahead of us tomorrow."

...

Surprisingly, they did not encounter any obstructions in the next few days. They took the route planned out by the magician and managed to avoid entering any cities. Instead, they exclusively picked paths in the rural area. Five days later, they reached Wind

Ridge of the Kingdom of Dawn. Another day of traveling toward south would bring them to the North of the Graycastle.

Yorko felt a little relieved.

He did not like the feeling of being alert all the time, for even the slightest sound at night would wake him up. In comparison, No. 76 was more self-collected. She took good care of both witches and Yorko.

Within a few days, No. 76 had totally blended in with these witches. She was, in particular, close to Amy, the most naive one, who had almost viewed No. 76 as her fourth sister.

Yorko leaned against the soft cushion while looking at the endless winding mountains and yellow fields outside the window. He started to hum involuntarily.

He had failed to fulfill his duties as an ambassador, but instead, he brought his old friend four witches. If Hill was right, how many rewards would His Majesty bestow him?

While he was still absorbed in his dream, the magician responsible for security suddenly came to him from the rear of the fleet. "Sir, we may have trouble. It looks like we've been tailed."

"What?"

Yorko's heart leaped into his throat. He quickly poked his head



out of the window but did not find anything unusual.

"There're knights seven or eight miles away from us. You can't see them from here." The magician spurred his horse into a small trot in order to keep up with the coach. "They don't march very fast but we're even slower. If things go on like this, they'll sooner or later catch up and spot us."

"Are you sure they're our enemies?"

"No. I took a glimpse from a distance but I can't take the chance. There're around 20 to 30 people, all fully armored. They don't have any extra relaying horses. It's probable that they tracked us through our hoof prints."

"Then what should we do?" Yorko instantly panicked out.

"We must get off the carriage and walk. There's a wood close by where horses can't go through, which can impede the procession of the knights," The magician replied in a low voice. "But this will only bring down their speed to the same level of ours. Once we're caught up, all of us will be doomed. If we want to successfully get rid of them, one person has to lead the fleet to move on and divert them to the main road."

He paused for a second and went on, "In other words, somebody has to make a sacrifice."

## Chapter 674: No. 76

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The carriages had stopped and all lined up along the side of the road while the Chom Brothers were busy tying them together. This way, it was possible for one person to drive all the vehicles.

After an intense argument, Annie had finally convinced the witches, taking them to follow Clown, plunging into the forest.

Now, it was the remaining people and Yorko's turn.

Rockhill carried a bag of food and walked passed him, saying, "My lord, we must leave now. If the enemies notice us, then all of our previous efforts will be wasted."

"Wait a minute. I want to talk with her."

He thought it would take him awhile to make a decision, but he actually needed less than 15 minutes.

No. 76 voluntarily stepped forward.

As did Rockhill and Annie, but as the leader of the group, Yorko eventually selected No. 76 to stay behind to cover their retreat.

"I went through five years of combat training at the 'Black Money'. I'm a fast runner, too, so don't worry about me." No. 76's words were simple, as simple as an ordinary farewell. "Isn't there a

village nearby? When I drive the carriages to the village and sneak into the crowd, they won't be able to find me at all. After this crisis, I'll join you guys again—right at the border city of the Kingdom of Graycastle. Please remember to wait for me there."

Meanwhile, the magician was quietly whispering to him that the village was more than 10 miles away. Given the distance, it would be impossible for anyone to make it there before the knights arrived, and after taking the time to tie the carriages together, their chances became even slimmer.

If our pursuers haven't been ordered by the King of Dawn to capture witches, there isn't a need for concern. However, if what the magician had predicted happened to be true... Yorko could easily imagine how the knights would vent their anger once they found out No. 76 had deceived them.

Yorko had a sinking suspicion that if the carriages happened to be stopped by the knightage from the king's city of Dawn, he would be the sole survivor. Appen Moya would likely ask Roland for a ransom, and he might ridicule and make him a laughing stock among the nobility. However, he would not hastily send him to the guillotine, unfortunately, anyone else that got caught would end up being executed without remorse.

He thought, perhaps, he should be the one to stay behind to attract the attention of their pursuers.

He wanted to step forward numerous times but he kept chickening-out every time he tried to open his mouth.

[An ambassador represents his king. I can't let them catch me and mock me because that would be the same as humiliating the King of Graycastle.] Yorko comforted himself. Unfortunately, he now was unable to look No. 76 in the eye.

[Goddammit! She's just a bought slave.]

Yorko walked over to No. 76 and just as he was about to say something, she spoke first, "My lord, this is my decision. This has nothing to do with the 'Black Money'—even though Silvermask always instructs us to be ready to sacrifice ourselves for it, however, I don't like it at all. I thought I would be living underground for my entire life to adulate those customers until I grew old and became the new Silvermask. Or, sent off to become a handyman also to never to see the sun again. Fortunately, you brought me out of that place. You made it so I could feel the vastness of the outside world and I've no regrets now. Please hurry into the forest. You're running out of time."

"But..."

No. 76 smiled and said, "Thank you, my lord. If you hadn't said anything, I would have been beaten to death in that underground limestone cave. My life belongs to you, and I may survive this crisis. If I do, let's meet in the Kingdom of Graycastle."

The Chom Brothers were behind Yorko urging him, "My lord, we have to go now."

Yorko took a deep breath, turned around, and left.

"Yes, she's just a slave."

[This is the best option.]

Yorko believed this, but he still felt an indescribable uneasiness in his heart.

Before he entered the forest, he turned one last time to look back. The carriages had begun to move slowly, driven by No. 76. She didn't linger and she didn't wave to bid farewell, she acted as if this were a common departure.

Just like the way she volunteered.

Soon, the shade from the forest blocked his view.

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No. 76 did not drive the carriages all the way to the village.

After traveling for about 300 feet, she reined in her horse and stopped the carriages.

She wouldn't be able to see the entrance of the forest anymore if she walked further.

She jumped off her horse and sat on the back of the last carriage, quietly waiting for the arrival of their pursuers.

She had been waiting for quite some time, however, it felt as if only a moment had passed. Waiting was a habit she had developed over her very long life, so she had become accustomed to it.

As the sun began to set in the west she could finally see the knight's figures appearing at the end of the road.

They didn't wear an emblem or ribbon as the knightage of the king's city did but based on their exquisite armor and high horses they were from some big city.

No. 76 tactfully counted the number of knights. There were 35 of them, half of which were squires whose equipment and actions seemed to be more refined than the knights from a small town or village.

The leader of the knights frowned when he saw the carriages waiting on the side of the road. He cracked his whip and the knights swarmed forward, surrounding them.

"Sir Lougan, there's no one else in the carriages!"

"Interesting... It looks like our Ambassador of Graycastle sent out scouts." Lougan smiled scornfully, "Caro, Jester, you two go back and check for footprints on both sides of the road. Since they've

abandoned their carriages and fled, they must have left some trace."

Lougan's words conveyed his intent.

"Sir, what about the woman?..."

"Cut off her hands and feet, then interrogate her. Unfortunately, since she dared to stay behind, you probably won't get any information from her."

No. 76 stood up as she said, "There's no need for an interrogation. They fled into that forest not too far behind you, but..."

"But, what?" A knight drew his sword with one hand and stretched out his other to try and grab her arm.

Apparently, the knights were not going to spare her life, even if she told them what they wanted to know.

"But, you guys won't get the chance to see the witches again."

With her impressive speed, No. 76 lifted her hand and clutched the wrist of the closest knight. She pulled his arm, sending him up into the air, flying involuntarily toward her.

She took this chance to slip his head under her armpit, getting him into a headlock.

She used her shoulder and squeezed. His armor made an unpleasant rattling noise and then with a snap, his helmet was dislodged, leaving a fist-sized gap in his armor near his throat.

The knight cramped violently, mouth gaping like a fish that had just been pulled from a river.

"Let go of Charlie!"

"Goddammit! Kill her!"

The other knights all pulled out their swords and thrust them towards No. 76.

No. 76 tossed the dead knight toward them, forcing them to pull back their swords. Taking her chance, she picked up the dead knight's sword and struck out at the nearest enemy.



# Chapter 675: Last Hope

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The blade cut through the armor neatly, blood splashing out from the cuts like red strings.

The knight did not make any sound as she had expected but instead grabbed her hand firmly as if to gain more time for his companions.

Unfortunately, he misjudged the difference in their power.

No. 76 easily escaped from his grasp, kicking him away while drawing out her blade.

Her kick felt like a blunder blow and his armor was entirely deformed. The knight spat out a mouthful of blood and smashed on the ground, no longer making any sound.

It seemed like her fists and kicks were more convenient. No. 76 glanced at her already dull blade, threw it away and jumped towards the rest of them with her bare fists.

The hunters instantly became the prey.

She jumped high and started jumping on the clumsy knights' shoulders. Every time she landed on a knight's head, she would clamp his helmet with her feet and then spin with the help of her body inertia, which resulted in a crackling noise as his cervical spine broke.

Compared with No. 76's swift movements, the knights' counterattack and dodging were not different from that of a pile of wood.

There was no problem even if she was unable to land on their heads, as she could hit their joints to make them lose their balance and then finish them off with a fatal kick. She could also easily trap her opponents with her physical gestures and lead them to attack her simultaneously only to end up killing themselves in the end.

"This... is impossible!"

"A damn monster!"

After a few rounds, the knights realized that their enemy was not normal. Not only did she possess extraordinary strength but was also an expert in the art of fencing and close combat skills. She was obviously an experienced fighter and her killing skills did not match the look of a twenty-year-old girl at all.

"Everyone move aside!"

With a loud cry, Sir Lougan led his horse in the crowd towards No. 76.

The rest quickly closed in around her, trying to trap her among them.

No. 76 sneered, did not retreat but instead went straight ahead and grabbed with her hands the horse's front legs, immobilizing it while it neighed nonstop.

No one could believe in their eyes when they saw what happened next. She lifted both the knight and his mount in the air and threw them to the others around her. The ones that got hit sustained wounds ranging from fractures and bleeding to immediate death. The knight himself sustained the worst impact naturally. As he fell from the horse's back, his body was distorted into an unnatural shape.

The surviving pursuers instantly scattered.

They jumped on their horses rushing to escape from this "monster". But No. 76 did not plan to give them this chance.

As soon as the enemy gave up resisting, a massacre started.

...

The night had already fallen when No. 76 finally finished cleaning up the battlefield.

The bodies of the knights were thrown into a nearby field and were covered briefly with some wheat straws. Discovering them was only a matter of time but by that time the witches would have already retreated to the Kingdom of Graycastle.

She crawled in the most extravagant coach, removed the cushion that Yorko usually slept on and carefully took out a colorful sparkling magic stone ring under the mattress. Even under the weak moonlight, one could see a cyclone swirling inside the transparent crystal.

After carefully examining the ring, No. 76 put it in her robe, fixed the cushion and lay on her back.

Next, she only needed to reach the next village and hire a wheeler to take her to the Kingdom of Graycastle.

They would probably not stay long at the border, maybe not even one day, but as long as her destination was the Western Region of the Kingdom of Graycastle, she would be able to meet those witches one day.

Looking at the bright moon outside the window, she sighed.

400 years had passed. The Union that used to reign the world had disappeared like dust in the wind. The only thing that remained unchanged was the stars in the sky.

Only when she looked up to the sky, would she feel like she was still alive—not just being alive underground or in the present after the disappearance of the Union, but actually living at the Holy City of Taquila 400 years ago.

That extremely prosperous witch empire.

The road to escape afterward... that could not be counted as living anymore.

The only thing that kept her going was a last remaining hope.

...

"So, how does it feel to have a female body once again?" someone asked, "Do you feel like you're being yourself again?"

She took deep breaths and moved her wrists and heels. "The distance is shorter."

"Of course, because this body is kind of small. A body too sturdy wouldn't be convenient to serve those humans." The voice laughed. "Furthermore, female God's Punishment Soldiers are already so rare. Don't be so picky."

"Appearance and age are also very important," someone else said, "Assuming the tastes of humans haven't changed a lot, none would want those body shells that look like men. Just looking at them makes one feel disgusted. You can ask Elena if you don't believe me. She would prefer a male body instead of a defective product like that."

"Correct. Among everyone, yours is the best looking."

"You know what I mean, Pasha." She shook her head, staring at the huge sarcoma in front of her with the moving tentacles. "Like this, I have to practice my limb control from the start. From sewing to holding a blade, each move would require a long time to master."

"It's okay." A tentacle dropped down and slowly poked her forehead. "We have got all the time in the world."

...

"Why do we need to deal with common people?" Alethea, who was soaking in hot magma, blew a chain of bubbles in dissatisfaction. "Can't we bring the witches here to test their talent?"

"Are you confused because of the long sleep?" Pasha refuted her. "It's not like 400 years ago anymore. One or two would be alright but do you plan to catch a hundred witches and bring them all in the mountains? I don't want to be regarded as a monster from the later generation."

"Even so, can't we let a witch execute this task? Don't forget that all of these bodies are actually enemies of the witches."

"First of all, she must completely trust us and possess the ability to protect herself. Where can we find someone like that? Nowadays the common people control the world so it's inevitable to deal with them—just like in the Land of Dawn at the first Battle of Divine

Will."

Pasha paused, stuck a tentacle out and pointed at her. "What do you think?"

She played with her sword, threw it in the air and just by slightly moving her body she let it slide into the scabbard. "I don't have any preference... as long as I can see Taquila's glory once again."

# Chapter 676: The Pursuit

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Sometimes, when she didn't want to train anymore, she would also enter the deepest area of the maze to see the magic core that the survivors of Taquila had so many high hopes for.

"This is the completely repaired instrument of Divine retribution? Are you sure it's useful?"

The biggest core looked like a simple spindle apparatus, nearing the size of a Senior Witch's experiment tower. Dozens of white brackets like visceral ribs were releasing magic power into it. Its uniqueness was obvious as it was floating mid-air of the maze without any hangings or support. Due to the cold light that the core emitted, the floor was no longer plain red.

"Of course, I've been studying it for 385 years!" A piece of sarcoma appeared from above and landed next to her using its tentacles. "The more I study it, the more I feel like it's a creation of God. Comparing with it, the things that had been researched by the Quest Society like the Sigil of Magic Stones were literally trash. Well... they were not even close to the essence of the magic power. If we had found this ruin 400 years ago, there would be probably no second Battle of Divine Will."

Celine would always become extremely excited whenever talking about the magic core, so she could only pat her rough exterior. "Have you verified the other cores?"



"Of course, Pasha even used the phantom instrument to display a miracle at the extremely far kingdom of common people. Oh, you were probably still asleep at that time, so you didn't see it."

"That far?" she asked surprisingly.

"Correct, much farther than any ability can reach, even the Infinite Sigil can't be compared with it," Celine replied while shaking her tentacles, "This is the power of the magic core. It allows the witches to possess power beyond their limits. That common person who kneeled down in shock because of the miracle is the best proof. The magic core should have been our aim, not the damn God's Punishment Army! Long live Lady Natalia!"

"But without the God's Punishment Army scheme, we wouldn't be able to survive until now." She pointed out.

"Eh.... well, long live Lady Alice too," Celine murmured reluctantly.

"But I heard Pasha saying that in order to activate the instrument of Divine retribution, the Chosen One is also required, is that right?"

"Correct, the Chosen One! This magic core is too immense and complicated. Without the Chosen One, it would be just a dead object unable to become a new deity!" Celine used her tentacles to grab her hand. "This is why all of our hopes rest with you. You must find her."

"If she does exist."

Hearing that, the voice of the sarcoma became heavier. "Yeah... if she does exist. Why can't I become the Chosen One?"

...

"I heard that Starfall City has been defeated! They've been defeated by the common people!"

After receiving the news, the magma underground started boiling, and all the Sleeping Ones and the Waking Ones started shaking their tentacles excitedly, which was the only way they could express their emotions.

But not everyone was excited by the news.

"How can this be possible?" For instance, Alethea's dancing expressed shock and anger. "How can they be defeated by common people?"

"Are the news credible?" someone asked.

"I'll ask the Chamber of Commerce of Dawn to investigate this." Pasha moved her tentacles to quiet them down. "Behave yourselves, don't shake the whole burrow!"

Surprisingly, even though they all looked alike, huge sarcomas with several tentacles on their epidermis, she could still recognize each of them easily.

It was probably due to the fact that they had been living here for so many years that she could distinctly remember everything from their breath frequency to their tentacle movements.

Pasha bent her huge figure and immersed in the lava. "For Taquila."

All the sarcomas that could still move dropped down and many voices sounded. "For Taquila."

The turbulent lava soon calmed down.

"Once the news has been confirmed, I suggest we immediately retrieve the divine relic," Elena said, "Starfall City no longer fits to possess it."

"But in that case, a fight with the God's Punishment Army will be unavoidable and I don't believe that they'll be unprepared. Even though they lost to the common people, it doesn't mean that Hermes would also be vulnerable," Alethea said in doubt, "Who knows how the common people won? Maybe they just killed a few hundreds of God's Punishment Soldiers and then believed to have claimed an important victory."

"This is also possible."

"I also think so."

Many expressed their approval.

"The other common people will help us understand," Pasha said, "and right now, the most important thing is to find the Chosen One. Banach Lothar has already set up the stage. Now, it was time for the actors to perform."

"If she can succeed in finding the Chosen One in this trip, the demons will definitely perish and the witches will eventually reach new heights!"

...

She walked to the exit of the ruin and stopped.

There was a huge palace, half of it being covered by dirt. At the center of the palace, there was a patio that reached the ten-meter-high surface.

Bright white light shed down the patio, forming a gentle beam of light which lit up a piece of land at her feet.

Opposite from the patio, there were two tombstones.

In contrast with their shabby and dirty surroundings, there was

no trace of dust on the tombstones.

Obviously, for hundreds of years, someone who had been sweeping this area clean, had also planted a small plain white flower for the person in the tomb.

She bent over, with one knee in front of the tomb.

This was where the greatest witches were buried. No matter what kind of disagreements they had before, or how intense their disputes were, it was ultimately for the survival of the witches. Thus, even after death, they were put together, never to be separated.

Two of the Union's Three Chiefs.

Alice, the unstoppable Queen of Starfall City.

Natalia, the dazzling Queen of Sunchaser.

"May the deities be with you."

After praying, she stood up and nodded to the top. "I'm ready, and please send me away."

A tentacle appeared from the dark, rolled up around her waist and rose towards the patio. The sky looked bigger and bigger until there was nothing but the sky anymore.

She blinked her eyes trying to get used to the bright light, then slowly opened her eyes and saw the long-awaited world unfolding before her eyes.

"I can only come this far." Pasha's tentacle waved from the hole's exit. "This body can't be exposed to the sun."

"I know." She bent over and hugged the tentacle for goodbye. "Wait for my good news."

"Oh right, you can't use your previous name anymore. The Chamber of Commerce of the common people will arrange a new identity for you, as well as a new more appropriate name—No. 76."

"Sounds nice." She smiled. "I 'll be going then. Take care."

"You too."

So, in order to pursue that faint hope, a new journey had begun.

# Chapter 677: The Promised Reunion

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Even though walking in the forests slowed them down, it was a sound trip.

Three days later, Yorko encountered a team of soldiers of the Graycastle miles away from the boundary. They were searching along the road. They wore unique brown leather uniforms with long metal rifles on their backs, which clearly showed their identities to him.

He understood what had happened when he met Duke Kant after he followed the team and returned to Evernight. Having received the letter from Hill, His Majesty Roland had directly sent two confidential letters away. One was to order the platoon of the First Army that stationed in Deepvalley Town to divide into four troops and enter the Kingdom of Dawn from the four junctions of the boundaries so as to reinforce the retreating diplomatic personnel. The other one was to inform Duke of the Northern Region to be ready for a war. That meant that the Duke began to prepare military materials, such as grain, cotton, and horse carriages. When the main army arrived in the Northern Region, they could declare a war to the Kingdom of Dawn.

Fortunately, the emissary delegation had had a sound trip.

The Duke exhaled a long breath of relief when he was saying this sentence. Yorko felt flattered.

But what touched him the most was how his old friend had

responded to this incident.

Though he clearly knew that the four witches in the delegation were more important, but his name was ranked at the top of the list in the letter. He felt that he had nothing to complain about his suffering and scary experiences at the thought of such a good treatment.

Yorko wrote a long letter about what had happened during the process of the retreat. He handed it over to the Duke who would pass the letter to His Majesty. He hoped that His Majesty could put an end to the military tensions in the Nothern Region. Now, he understood what Hill had said was true. His Majesty took it much more seriously.

Additionally, he was quite surprised by the responding speed of the First Army. Apart from the time for carrier pigeons to deliver letters back and forth, the army, which originally bore responsibilities to defend against the remaining force of the church and demonic beasts, could carry out the operation on the very day they received the order. As far as he knew, nobles used to spend half a month summoning knights, mercenaries, and free peoples, let alone dividing them into groups to carry out missions. Once the troop spread out with less supervision, those mercenaries paid aforetime would escape over one night.

This might be the reason why his old friend could conquer the king's city in one day.

Now, Yorko dimly understood that the military force of His Majesty was much better than that of the other nobles, not only in



terms of weapons but actually beat them in every other aspect.

As a messenger, he was not alone. The whole kingdom backed him up and fought with him as his sharp sword. He felt exhilarated at this thought like there was a flame burning in his chest.

Now, No.76 was the only one he was worried about.

According to his promise to her, the first person who arrived at the destination would hang a four-colored flag at a visible spot. Yet Duke Kant ordered his men to search each corner of Evernight but did not find such a flag. Now that they lived in the house arranged by the duke, Yorko directly set up a flagpole in front of the door with a four-colored flag fluttering in the wind. Once No.76 entered the inner city, she would immediately see the flag and find them.

Actually, he was not the only one that worried about No.76. Through windows, Yorko often saw Annie and Amy standing under the flagpole and waiting for No.76's safe return. As they knew each other better, Annie gradually changed her attitude towards him. At least, she would not stare at him, full of vigilance.

Hill's men had talked to him several times and they had hoped that he could go to the Western Region as soon as possible. The magician had directly told him that the chance that No.76 successfully distracted the knights while at the same time staying alive was narrow. If those knights had not targeted at them, she would have arrived at the border village one day later and arrived in Evernight earlier than they had. Now, nothing happened at their meeting spot, so No.76 was very likely dead already.

Yorko knew that the magician was right, but he wanted to wait for another few days, just for the words she had said when parting.

"When the situation turns better, I'll meet you again, right in the border city of the Graycastle. Make sure that you wait for me there!"

After they parted, Yorko finally knew why he had that strange feeling.

Although No.76 was a slave in name, he never treated her like a slave, neither in the Black Money nor in the Kingdom of Dawn.

Yorko had decided to give her freedom if she came back alive.

But the decision came too late.

Three more days passed. While he was thinking about leaving the Northern Region the next day, things seemed to turn for the better. A carriage stopped beside the flagpole. The coachman seemed to be very anxious and wanted to ask the guards about something, but he was afraid to come forward to ask. Yorko witnessed everything through the window, but before he came out, Annie and Amy had gone up to the carriage.

No.76 came back!

Each member of the delegation had heard the news and even Duke Kant, out of curiosity, came to see the brave maid who had sacrificed herself.

But her condition was not good.

When Yorko saw No.76, she had bruises all over her body. She was unable to move due to her broken right hand and left foot.

"Sir..." No.76 blinked her eyes and managed to summon up a smile, "thank you for waiting for me!"

All of a sudden, he felt completely relieved.

"I'm glad you came back."

They then stayed in Evernight for another week until No.76 was in a stable condition. After that, they went to Deepvalley Town where they took a ship and left the Nothern Region.

In the following days, Yorko got to know what had happened to her after her departure.

The knights of Glow had caught up with her before the sunset. In order to gain her some time, she untied the reins of all the horses and spurred them to run in the opposite direction to stop the knights who were speeding up. At the same time, she had attempted to flee to the mountains on the roadside. After a short while, however, she had been stopped by a creek.

Considering that she would die after being captured, she thus had ridden off the cliff that was 30 meters high. Luckily, there were branches and cane vines on both sides of the precipice, so she had smashed into pieces. However, during the long drop, her head bumped into the rock and bled. Her right hand and left foot were broken by the rocks that jutted out. By the time she had reached the stream, she had sunk into a coma.

The knights stopped chasing, probably because they had not found a safe path leading downhill or they had thought she was dead. It had been midnight when she had woken up. She had used splashed chilling stream water to keep herself awake. Sometimes she had been able to catch several small fish and shrimps.

Two days later, fishermen around there had found her and saved her life.

Hero could remove her pain, but could not cure her wounds. Now, they had to go to the Western Region and see whether there were witches who could cure her.

Anyway, she's come back alive!

Satisfied, Yorko stood in the wind at the bow. The ship sailed towards Neverwinter with its sails stirring in the air.

# Chapter 678: The New Orders of the Fjords

Translator: TransN Editor: Meh

A long-lost guest was ushered into Neverwinter on the end of the autumn twilight.

She was the businesswoman, Margaret.

Roland had prepared an extremely high-standard courtesy for the friend who was the first to come onboard and brought generous returns to Border Town during its difficult time. She was not only welcomed by the First Army's cannon firing but Roland had come to Shallow Beach to welcome her in person.

"That's very kind of you, Your Majesty," Margaret smiled and said, "I'm simply an ordinary businesswoman."

"The western region wouldn't be so developed today without your help," Roland said in ease, "Neverwinter will never let such a friend down."

Margaret's Chamber of Commerce was a great help in both the initial acquisition of a large amount of food and also in leasing ships to transport the refugees in the later days. Even Theo had depended on Margaret's network and support to gain a firm foothold in the old king's city. Although these were not provided free of charge, Roland was very clear that many things could not be done with only the money.

"It's my honor to be your friend," Margaret slightly bowed and said, "Other than to fulfill the previously signed perfume contract, I've brought you a new business opportunity this time." She pointed to her back and said, "They're the most popular businessmen in the Fjords and they're very interested in the plan of the steam-powered boat."

"Really?" Roland smiled. "Would you please give me a brief introduction later?"

According to his usual practice, eating and talking was the way to deal with the businessmen. The long table in the living room was filled with a variety of delicious food and the overseas visitors seemed to be particularly happy without eating fish. They had been trying to control themselves and behave as elegantly as possible as noble etiquette was not popular in the Fjords, but after a few drinks, the imitated etiquette was gone as the atmosphere was increasingly heated.

Roland did not really care about this as he preferred a lively dining environment as opposed to the complicated dining rules in the palace.

He also had a brief understanding of the visiting business group through the chit-chatting session. Other than Gammon and Marleen who first came to visit Border Town, there was also the Chamber of Commerce from Sunset Island and Shallow Water Town. Both of the islands in the south and the north next to Crescent Moon Bay formed a closely-connected business circle.

Although the three islands were not very big in size, they held

the most population and power as the first residential area in the Fjords. Besides, it was very competitive among them as could be seen from the size and scale of their ships. Each of the three-masted ships parked at the dock of Shallow Beach could carry around 300 people and cargos of similar weight. The price of such sailing ships was around 5,000 gold royals each excluding the sailors. It was obvious that both of the Chamber of Commerces did not want to fall behind Crescent Moon Bay in the competition of respect and power.

After the desserts were served, it was time for the official discussion.

"Margaret mentioned that you want to purchase steam engine?"

"Yes, Your Majesty." Nibelung, the person-in-charge of Shallow Water Town's Chamber of Commerce was the first to speak. "However, other than the steam engine, we also hope to own a steam-powered boat like the one you sold to Crescent Moon Bay."

"I heard that the modification fee you previously quoted was 1,800 gold royals and Sunset Island is willing to pay an extra 200 gold royals to modify 5 ships at the price of 2,000 gold royals each," Atiyer, the businessman from Sunset Island said as he was unwilling to be left behind, "Sunset Island's Chamber of Commerce can pay half of the deposit upfront."

They were apparently referring to the paddle steamer that Crescent Moon Bay purchased a year ago which was an almost obsolete technology to Roland. However, it would be a very cost-effective transaction to him as he could train the workers with this

order while earning a good amount of money.

"It'll take two to three months to build a paddle steamer and it'll take around a year to build 5 ships. Barov, the City Hall Director, will sign the contract with you if you can accept that."

"That's not a problem at all. However, Sunset Island has a small request," Atiyer cleared his throat and said, "We hope you can hire the craftsmen from the Fjords to build the ship."

"What do you mean?" Roland lifted his eyebrows and asked.

"It's just like the steam engine factory of Crescent Moon Bay, we'll provide you with a group of craftsmen and the ships they build will be first used by Sunset Island and then they can choose whether to leave or stay after the completion of 10 years."

"Shallow Water Town also hopes to sign the same contract," Nibelung added, "Five sailing ships are only for the first order. There'll be at least five ships to construct every year after that if you agree with our request."

"I see," Roland thought, "So, this is a big order which lasts for 10 years in which every completed transaction each year costs up to 10,000 gold royals. Additionally, they won't be controlled by others after 10 years as they'll have learned the detailed construction method by then."

In fact, he did not mind to spread this method at all. The paddle



steamer was apparently outdated as compared to the steam turbine that was under development, along with the triple-expansion steam engine that was already in production.

His initial purpose of signing a 10-year contract with Crescent Moon Bay, rather than to prevent the technology leaking out, was for the craftsmen to adapt to the life of the western region, and afterwards, they would refuse to return to the Fjords and become a member of Neverwinter.

It was just a seemingly beautiful castle in the air apart from the industry-based technology.

Thinking about it, Roland knocked on the table and said, "There's no problem in principle, but there could be some amendments needed on the details, such as changing the 10 year duration to five years..."

Speaking of it, both of the two businessmen looked extremely happy about it. It was an even better choice for them if they could master the construction method of the steam-powered boat earlier.

"I can even give a 20% discount on the price if Shallow Water Town and Sunset Island are willing to let the craftsmen stay in the western region. What do you think?"

"This..."

Both of them immediately hesitated as it was difficult to train a

craftsman. However, it was hard for them to determine if it was a cost-effective deal for reducing the duration to five years with a few hundreds of people and an additional annual saving of 2,000 gold royals.

"Your Majesty, may I answer you later after I discuss it with the others in the Chamber of Commerce?" Nibelung asked.

"Yes. Of course," Roland made a gracious hand gesture and said.

"Please excuse me temporarily." Atiyer subsequently left the living room.

"So..." he shifted his gaze to Gammon and Marleen and said, "Are you not here for the steam-powered boat?"

The representatives of Crescent Moon Bay had been very calm when both the Chamber of Commerce was fighting to be the first to discuss the business. They only occasionally talked about their previous business with Border Town and it felt like they were not here for business but casual chit-chatting... Such actions had raised Roland's curiosity.

"No, Your Majesty. We're also here for the steam-powered boat," Gammon took a sip of the white liquor and said, "but not the wooden paddle steamer. Crescent Moon Bay wants the indestructible steel ship that can split the storm, just like the one you built for Sir Thunder."

Margaret's look immediately changed after hearing this.

## Chapter 679: A Generous Return

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"Your Majesty, I absolutely did not disclose the information conferred between you and Sir Thunder to anyone..." She quickly explained.

"I know," Roland waved and looked at Gammon with great interest. "Where did you hear about this?"

Although he did not regard the matter as confidential, it was almost impossible for the outsider to know about the steel ship as there were still a couple more months to go until it was fit to launch. Plus, only the bottom of the hull was completed at the moment and it was built in a totally enclosed shipyard. All the workers they had selected were the most skillful local residents.

They would have to pay special attention if any locals were secretly in contact with the Fjords.

"It's big news in Fjords that Sir Thunder is recruiting new crews and that the campaign is on a much bigger scale than any of the recruitments in the past. It isn't a surprise that many people from Fjords have joined his team since there are many outstanding captains in Crescent Moon Bay." Gammon said with a smile, "The news regarding the magical steel ship also came from Thunder. He must take some hard measures to dispel the concerns of others about an in-depth exploration of the ocean to the west of Shadow Islands."

"How many people know about this?"

"Not many, Your Majesty. The captain would not have revealed anything to us if he didn't receive a great help from Crescent Moon Chamber of Commerce earlier. After all, Sir Thunder is a lot more highly respected than us businessmen."

"I see," Roland nodded, "however, I can't meet your demand since we cannot build a second ship in a short time as this kind of ship is extremely hard to build."

"We understand, Your Majesty," Marleen said, "We're just hoping that you can sell the second steel ship to us after you complete the transaction with Sir Thunder. Crescent Moon Bay Chamber of Commerce is willing to pay 10% deposit up front and we'll pay 40% of the remaining once the project starts."

"They have already started to talk about the deposit before they even know the price." Roland once again realized the Fjords people's adventurous spirit. Perhaps they smelled the great potential of the ship much faster than any ruler of the Four Kingdoms. At least, he had never seen any great nobles who would pay a high price for something he had never seen before.

"The city of Neverwinter also needs more than one steel ship, so it'll be two or three years later by the time the shipyard has time to build you one." Roland slowly said, "Have you not considered to send your craftsmen to participate in the construction and sign a new ten-year or five-year contract? That might speed up the construction process, and you can also learn the relevant techniques."

"You're kidding me," Gammon felt a little embarrassed and said, "We absolutely don't mean to covet it. We won't dare to ask for such techniques. With a steel ship like this, you can definitely become the most popular partner in the Fjord Islands, provided that it's really like what Sir Thunder described."

"I'm not kidding." Roland took a sip of the drink and shrugged.

"..." It was their turn to be shocked this time.

After a moment, Gammon said in disbelief, "You mean... you're willing to disclose the technologies to the Crescent Moon Bay Chamber of Commerce?"

"As long as you can provide enough craftsmen as I need not only blacksmiths and carpenters but apprentices as well," Roland replied without hesitation. "I'll need 2000 of them. You can recruit literate civilians to make up the number if you don't have that many. You need to provide the laborers within five years. In that case, we'll start the ship construction next year. Of course, you'll still bear the expenses incurred on shipbuilding."

"I really don't know what you're thinking, Your Majesty," Gammon said with a wry smile. "Perhaps it's not your most valuable technology just yet?"

Roland shook his head and said, "The steel ship I'm building for Thunder is the most cutting-edge technology that the city of Neverwinter has so far."

He was not making a fool of himself. "So far" was indeed no exaggeration at this point of time... Who knew what would happen five or six years later?

"Then, why are you..." Gammon startled. Then he waved with resignation and said, "No, I'd better not ask. The Crescent Moon Bay is willing to make the deal."

Why? Since the development of technologies could not be achieved without a foundation, not to mention those of ship construction. Fjords would not have enough manpower to maintain this huge industry, even if they were given mines, machines, and converters. When the first steam engine was introduced, the manufacturing industry could no longer be copied by a pair of skilled hands or a hammer.

Roland could not help but remember the answer of the Black Sea Shipyard director when he was asked about the need of Varyag's construction, "It needs the central party committee, the State Planning Commission, the military-industrial commission and nine Commissions of Industry for National Defence." Although steel ships were not so highly demanded, it was also the result of the entire city of Neverwinter's joint production. Other than the core power parts and hull welding work that Anna was in charge of, the remaining parts had been distributed in batches to the assembly plant and processed by the common people.

It would be an inevitable trend of industrial development.

Therefore, he needed more manpower to achieve his goal rather than protecting the technologies from being stolen. The

population of the city of Neverwinter was increasing drastically but it was not fast enough for Roland. However, he did not need to explain this to a businessman. The man would eventually understand five years later.

"What a wise choice! The steel ship will not let you down," Roland lifted the glass and said, "cheers."

"Cheers... what?"

"It means drink up the wine in a gulp for celebration," he calmly explained. "The new etiquette of the king's city."

"Well, really? In this case... cheers." Both of the businessmen from Crescent Moon Bay were forced to drink up the white wine in their glasses.

After a while, Nibelung and Atiyer also returned to the living room and agreed to sign the contract.

As a result, the City of Neverwinter received the biggest order they ever had. It included a renovation deposit of 4,000 gold royals (the remaining 4,000 gold royals would be paid upon the completion of the construction), and a prepayment of 5,000 gold royals for the construction, both of which would be received by the end of the year. There would also be a total price set out according to the subsequent construction progress. He could already imagine Barov's grinning face. Once City Hall had such great revenues, they would be financially more capable of arranging a job for every citizen.



Nibelung changed the topic after they had reached an agreement of the business, "Your Majesty, we also heard that there are a lot of perfumes for sale here other than the ships, I wonder..."

"Miss Margaret had signed a contract with me six months ago. She'll be my sales representative and will be responsible for the sale of perfumes in the Fjord Islands after we open the Shallow Beach port. So, you should talk to her instead if you want to buy perfumes."

Roland added after seeing his regretful expression, "However, the city of Neverwinter is also preparing to promote a brand new merchandise. Perhaps you will be interested."

At these words, he clapped his hands, and the guard who was on-duty outside the hall quickly came in with three glass bottles.

The bizarre color of the clear liquid in the bottles immediately caught the businessmen's attention.

# Chapter 680: The Joint Chamber of Commerce

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"What's it? A new fruit wine?" Margaret curiously asked.

"If it's just a fruit wine, it won't be as easily sold as the perfumes," Nibelung shook his head and said.

"That may not be the case," Gammon said while looking at the glass bottle with interest, "Not to mention the contents of the bottle, simply the unique container is worth several gold royals."

"Is this a new product of Alchemist Workshop of the king's city?" Marleen added, "I've never seen such a big crystal glass bottle before."

"The appearance isn't important, and the key lies within the product itself." Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry for a moment as he did not expect these businessmen to be interested in the glass bottles first. The total cost of the colorless glass vessels was low as all it needed was to master the formula. However, he did not sell only the glass vessels as all the glasses produced in the city of Neverwinter was to supply for the chemical laboratory, perfume plant, and beverage plant.

"It's called Chaos Drinks as it's chaotic and unpredictable just like the name. Each of them is a unique treat." He cleared his throat and pretended to be mysterious. "I bet you've never tasted the same taste. You may try it if you don't believe it."

All three bottles of drinks were carefully selected by Roland from Evelyn's beverages warehouse. They not only had their own characteristics, but two of the bottles had also been specially processed. One of the bottles was iced, which was freezing cold and pleasantly cooling. The other bottle was added with dry ice, which could be described as the world's first carbonate beverages.

All the five merchants looked astonishing after taking a sip of it as Roland expected.

"How exactly was it brewed?" Atiyer smacked his lips. "Those fruit wine has an indescribable taste as compared to the others."

"Looking at this cup of green apple juice, it's still gushing air... Oh God, is it breathing?"

"Apple? Even honey isn't so sweet!"

The businessmen were each expressing their views while the toasting did not stop. They were continuously drinking until the three bottles were empty.

"Lap..." Gammon licked his lips as if he could not get enough of it. "Your Majesty, your... Chaos Drinks... are fantastic!"

"Do you think it'll have a market if it was sold as a merchandise?"

"Of course!" The businessman from Crescent Moon Bay said without thinking, "There may be a slight difference in the popularity of the three drinks, considering the difference of personal tastes, but they definitely are all rare wines! I bet no one will be interested in the top-grade fruit wine from the Kingdom of Dawn anymore after tasting these wines."

"You're pretty honest." Roland could not help but smile. Most businessmen would pick the flaws to keep their prices down if they wanted to buy the goods. Such straightforward praise was very rare.

"I don't dare to deceive Your Majesty, and I don't want to lie to my tongue," Gammon paused for a moment and said, "but I don't quite understand one thing."

"Tell me about it."

"Why would you give it such a weird name?" He picked up the iced empty bottle which had a thin hoar on it. "For example, this... can be called 'deep-sea icing'. I can assure you that it'll appear on every banquet in the summer."

"I think that bottle of numbing, green-colored drink can be called 'roe manna'. The feeling of numerous fish eggs hatching on the tongue is really memorable," Marleen added.

"I think so, too." Margaret laughed. "Although the word 'chaos' sounds very novel, it can't highlight their distinct characteristics. It'll sell better if you name it separately."

Roland pretended to be regretful and said, "Unfortunately, these drinks are a unique enjoyment. In fact, these three bottles are the last stock."

"Do you mean... they're no longer brewed?"

"Yes, I can't tell you the process of brewing chaotic drinks. However, the end result is always changing and their only common point is that they're all very tasty. That's why I named it 'Chaos' and the quantity reduced with every mouth taken."

The crowd took a deep breath at the same time and everyone showed an unbelievable look. The scarcity was valuable and these items had an excellent quality of uniqueness... It could definitely bring the Fjords... and even the four kingdoms a trend.

Gammon was the first to speak. "Your Majesty, please let me be your agent for this. The Crescent Moon Bay fleet is spread across the coast of the four kingdoms and only we can bring you the most generous returns."

"Crescent Moon Bay's maritime trading center has always been in the Kingdom of Dawn, when was the Everwinter trade route expanded?" The representative of Shallow Water Town Chamber of Commerce interrupted.

Atiyer quickly added, "The merchant ships that head to the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter are mostly from Sunset Island. You're deceiving His Majesty."

Roland stretched his arms out and interrupted the arguments of the three. "In this case, let's set up a Joint Chamber of Commerce."

"Joint... Chamber of Commerce?"

"Yes, participants need to sit down and negotiate the area they're responsible for, and the city of Neverwinter is solely responsible for delivering the goods in order to avoid malicious competition to bring down the price." He described the concept of regional agency as clearly as possible. "You can plan for the division according to your own strength as all of you have a long-established business and your own familiar selling towns. In this case, you can quickly sell the goods and won't have to compete with the peers. The final income of sales will be divided according to the proportion of the contract. As a result, everyone involved will be protected."

The businessmen quickly understood the simple principle. "Sounds good, but how to determine the specific area and division ratio? The beverages sent to the Kingdom of Everwinter and the beverages sold in the Fjords would have a huge costs difference."

"The cost of transportation is definitely something to consider, and there are also manpower costs, selling prices, product output, etc. In general, agents with the highest costs will receive an extra credit due to the limited supply. The details of the provisions will definitely need to be gradually discussed to all parties' satisfaction."

It looked like it was decreasing the total income at the first

glance. However, without malign competition, their profits would be much higher with the strengths of the three chambers of commerce.

A lot of the products from the city of Neverwinter had so far only been consumed internally by the Convenience Market due to the lack of sales channels. The businessmen from the Fjords who built their fortunes by selling merchandises were the best channels for Roland. It was undoubtedly the most economical way for him to provide them the merchandises to be sold to every corner of the mainland in the future.

"I'm willing to join." Margaret was the first to show her support.

The others also wanted to give it a try after seeing her declaration.

Roland smiled and said, "Rest assured, cooperating is always more powerful than standing alone. This will be a win-win situation for everyone as long as we work together."

# Chapter 681: The Preparation of Sleeping Island

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Sleeping Island in the Fjords.

As the winter approached, the sea breeze swept through as the island became colder. Tilly could hear the sharp howling when the cold wind blew through the gap even with the window closed.

Not many people would stroll outside the house at this time. However, there were always celebrations in the square of Sleeping Island with a grand bonfire that lasted for several days and pots of boiling hot fish soups. The witches had transformed the square into a lovely paradise with their abilities.

Tilly also wanted to join the carnival and share the joy of the church's defeat, if only she did not have so many things to deal with.

The witches' life had changed radically since she brought the news back. It was not the change of their living conditions but they had become mentally different. Everyone seemed to have their burdens lifted off their shoulders with more vivid eyes while they had clearly looked and spoke more freely and comfortably.

They finally did not have to live in fear and worry anymore. The stress that had been pressing on them had finally broken down and the densely-gathered clouds disappeared. Their enthusiasms could not be dispersed even by the howling cold wind.



"This is probably the 'liberation' Roland mentioned," Tilly thought.

This was when Camilla Dary, the Chief Butler of Sleeping Island came into the house after knocking.

"Your Highness, I've completed the preliminary statistic for the witches who're willing to go to the Western Region," she said while sitting crossed-legged opposite of Tilly and she put a list down on the low table, "and almost half of them have signed up to help the Western Region."

"Really? It's better than I expected. You've done a good job." Tilly smiled and nodded while picking up the list to take a detailed look.

Regarding the relocation to the Western Region, Princess Tilly had told the witches that they could go to support the construction of the city of Neverwinter in order to withstand a greater catastrophe, which was the Battle of Divine Will.

In order to make sure everyone voluntarily made their choices, Tilly did not hide the facts about the witches' empires, the Union, and the demon. She had told everyone that the church was only part of the Union and that the real enemy of the human beings was the demons instead. They had no mercy or pity, so helping the Western Region was also helping themselves. Of course, she also made it clear that they could live a peaceful life on the island, if they did not want to leave.

She had initially thought that many sisters would decide to stay on Sleeping Island as they might be intimidated by the new enemies or they had become fed up of dealing with the common people or they had doubt about the uncertain future. However, the statistical results showed that nearly half of them had decided to help. The demons that they had never seen were far less scary than the church and the witches' wish for the broader outside-world had not extinguished.

"They're interested in Prince Roland who defeated the pope and wanted to see how the lord who eradicated the witches' enemy looks like." Camilla helplessly sighed. "And, most importantly, your elder brother also gained a lot of extra points for himself with this identity and they had transferred the same trust they have in you to him."

"You seem worried."

"Of course, he's a noble and a common person after all. He's fundamentally different from us... And, to be honest, blood sometimes can be a hurdle to the benefit." The chief butler frowned and said, "Your Highness, I'm neither questioning your decision nor saying that your brother is a hypocrite, but what if... I mean what if what he seeks is in contrary to the interests of the witches, and kill us like the other nobles?"

"I understand your concern, this decision was made after my repeated consideration." Tilly put down the list and held Camilla's hand. "The witches may be different from the common people but we all have the common goal under the threat of Battle of Divine Will which is to stay alive. Why not we take this opportunity to

integrate into the world while forming an integral community of interests with the common people rather than completely dodging it? As our abilities go deeper into all sectors, Roland can't leave the witch's power even if he regrets and wants to cancel the agreement with Sleeping Island."

"However... will he let go of his control on us?"

"Based on what happened in the past six months, Roland did not seem to impose any additional restrictions on the witches. Otherwise, the Witch Union in the Western Region would not be supporting him without holding back." Tilly smiled. "And, I believe in my instincts more than these general principles."

"Instinct?"

"Yeah... I don't think he'll do that," she slowly said while tapping the table.

Camilla hesitated and finally laughed as if she was surrendering. "Thinking about it now, your instincts are never wrong since I knew you."

"It'll be the same this time." Tilly smiled.

"I understand, Your Highness. I'll finish the preparatory work for the witches' relocation as soon as possible," the chief butler said with a hand covering her chest.

"Thank you."

Princess Tilly was clear that Camilla who was born as a noble had lost her confidence to the noble as she had seen them stop at nothing to get powers and interests. However, she did not know that Tilly could feel that Roland was obviously not simply a traditional noble through her deeper contact developed with Roland. Roland treated everyone differently, not only the witches as compared to the noble. She called him "brother", not because of the relationship between her and the previous Prince Roland, but she simply liked this kind of barrier-free and unbiased relationship.

When she talked to Roland, she could always feel relaxed and comfortable which she had not felt for a long time. She believed that the other witches also felt the same.

"Oh yeah, I recently heard some bad rumors." Camilla changed the subject.

"What's the rumor?"

"It's about the news you brought back. Some of them think that they should also imitate the Union and create an organization with witches as the superiors to regain the glory of their ancestors since the witches had once created a huge empire that rules all the common people."

"The source?" Tilly lifted her eyebrows and said, "Is it the witches from the Bloodfang Association?"

"No... they believe in loyalty to the strong. The Western Region could defeat the seemingly invincible enemies, and Iffy, Softfeathers, and Nightfall further confirmed them in this belief. The combat witches were the first to register to go to the city of Neverwinter." Camilla shook her head. "I've surveyed and the source should be some other witch organization."

The witches in Sleeping Island were a large aggregation which was similar to the Witch Cooperation Association in Seawindshire. There were a few scattered groups other than the Bloodfang Association. These groups were generally built to evade the church's arrests and to help each other before Tilly's appeal. However, they did not have the power of Bloodfang Association and they had rarely gossiped about her policies.

"I understand." She nodded.

"Do we need to talk to their leader?"

"No, let them be," Tilly said, "and they'll naturally understand that the Union has become history when they reach the Western Region. And, a completely new path is waiting for us."

# Chapter 682: A Never Lonely Road

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After Camilla Dary left, Ashes stepped out of the study.

She sat on her knees on the rug, hands stretching out to Tilly, and said, "come here."

"I'm fine..."

"Don't pretend to be okay. There are no other people." Ashes interrupted her.

Tilly twitched her lips and finally moved her body. She thrust herself into Ashes' chest, back facing her.

Hearing the strong heartbeats of Ashes coming through her clothes like rhythmical drumbeats, Tilly felt calm and reassured.

"Thank you," Tilly said softly.

"Don't push yourself too hard. If we make a wrong decision, the worst scenario is that we go back to the Sleeping Island." Ashes gently smiled and said, "If you leave, I'm sure Roland Wimbledon won't stop you, for you have all the witches in the Witch Union backing you up." She paused for a while and continued, "besides, you don't need speak so resolutely. In this way, you don't need to suffer such great pressure now."

Princess Tilly shook her head and said, "I must be convinced before persuading the other witches to trust me. If I'm somehow hesitant and confused, the decision will go nowhere."

Though she appeared to be very confident in the decision, she was still a little concerned. She was not worried about Roland. In fact, he had expressed his attitude when he had agreed to continue to use the Sleeping Spell to manage the immigrated witches. She was only concerned about two things. After living an exclusive life for nearly two years, could those 300 some witches smoothly fit in Neverwinter? When the Battle of Divine Will was over, would common people change their views about witches?

These were unknown risks and also the problems Tilly had to think about. In the eyes of the other witches, she looked very confident and spunky, but only several witches understood her concerns. After all, from now on, she had to bear responsibilities for over 300 witches, not just for herself. It could be said that all the witches on Sleeping Island felt more relaxed after the church was defeated, except her, for her responsibilities were even greater.

"Just do what you've thought." Ashes embraced her from her back. "The immigration won't start until the end of the next Months of Demons. If you still feel worried, you can spend the remaining months conducting a thorough investigation."

"Is the Charming Beauty ready to sail?"

"Anytime."

"Don't forget your textbooks and exercise book. You can learn some new knowledge on the way."

"Uhm...If I read books in the cabin, I'll be seasick."

"If you want to protect me, you have to become stronger than this. For example, you can try to be a legendary Transcendent... How can you be stronger without studying?"

Ashes mumbled agitatedly, "OK, ok, I got it."

"Don't worry. If there is something that you can't understand, you can ask me at any time. You should know that I have nothing to do on the ship."

"Yes, yes, yes. As you wish, Your Highness."

"Fortunately, I am not alone anymore." Tilly thought.

No matter what will happen to them afterward, someone would always accompany me.

"Yeah," Tilly replied her. She closed eyes and felt the warmth coming from her back. It felt like her heavy responsibilities were greatly reduced.

The wind was still chilling outside the windows while the inside



was warm like in spring.

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To establish a Joint Chamber of Commerce was a complicated matter, for each treaty needed repeated amendments. Roland left it to Barov and Edith and then turned his attention to the winter operation plan.

Undoubtfully, Months of Demons of this year came much later than that of last year. Today was the last day of late fall, but there were no signs of snow, except for a grey sky outside the windows.

It was good news to Neverwinter. The later the Months of Demons came, the more residential buildings would be built by the construction team.

Based on the reports of City Hall, the Western Region was richer in all materials this year than past years, especially in grain. The Stronghold Area had yielded ten times higher grain than the average amount of the past years. Luckily, Petrov had built grain storages in time and half of the wheat was sent to the Border Area, as the stronghold could not house such a large amount of grain.

With enough grain, he felt more secured to do anything.

Besides, there was enough ammunition. After Anna had improved the new generation machine tool and processing machinery, they were first used to process and load bullets, so the

productivity had enhanced a lot. At the same, the shortage of bullets after the battle with the church was pretty much filled.

Due to the fact that he had enough grain and weapons, Roland could not help thinking of other plans.

The First Army took priorities to prevent demonic beasts and guard Neverwinter, but it seemed a waste to have thousands of soldiers all in the city. After all, most of demonic beasts would attack the big breach of Hermes while only a small part of separated beasts would attack one side of Misty Forest. Additionally, the firepower capability of the First Army was more than ten times stronger than that of last year. In such a case, some common demonic beasts could not even approach the city wall.

Besides, why he was eager to make other plans was that there were no rivals on the whole continent against the First Army, not even demonic beasts. When fighting against Duke Ryan, he had had to spare no efforts and used all guns and cannons. But now, he just needed to dispatch a team of 500 soldiers, and they could defeat all knightage who dared to directly confront them.

So when an army defended the city wall, he could also dispatch another unit to open a second battlefield. Was it possible to be a way of reducing the burden of next year's expedition?

Roland found it not a tricky question. As before when Months of Demons came, endless heavy snow completely blocked the entire Western Region. However, since Neverwinter had dozens of cement carriers, land transportation was no longer a problem. Further, the First Army could also utilize Redwater River to

transport soldiers and materials to their destination.

As long as he made a good plan, Neverwinter could be totally capable of winning two battles at the same time. "Ah, it sounds somehow a monopoly."

After receiving Hill's letter, Roland ordered the Nothern Region to be ready for a war. That was not a bluff. If the King of Dawn, Appen Moya, indeed neglected his warnings and arrested the messenger's party, he would have to change his plans and take the priority to force Appen to free them. However, a cross-border war required a considerable logistic support. If there were fewer soldiers, they could not continue fighting. Plus, Hermes Plateau which was guarded by the church would fall apart at any time. Therefore, it was not an appropriate time to declare a war to a neighboring country at this moment.

But luckily, the delegation arrived safe and sound, so he could target a place closer to the Western Region.

"Your Majesty, did you request to see me?"

As the door of the office was open, Iron Axe strode in.

"Are you interested in returning to your hometown in winter? If you go back now, it won't be so hot there yet." Roland spread out a very roughly-drawn map of the Graycastle and pointed to the bulging corner in the south. He smiled and asked, "I remember that both you and Echo come from the land of the desert?"

He wanted to conquer the Southernmost Region in winter, the habitat for Mojin Clan.

# Chapter 683: The Desert Plan

Translator: TransN Editor: Meh

"Your Majesty, do you plan to go on an expedition of conquest to Southernmost Region?" Iron Axe's ever peaceful face showed a rare agitation. "But the Months of Demons are drawing near..."

"How many soldiers do you think should be left in Neverwinter to tackle the swarming demonic beasts?"

"Well..." Iron Axe deeply inhaled to suppress his agitation. "Judging from the number of demonic beasts from last year, 1,000 soldiers would be able to guard the city wall."

"So to be on the safe side, 2,500 soldiers would be sufficient to guard the city. Besides, a new round of recruitment has begun, which will safeguard Neverwinter," Roland said, and then walked to the French window, "so tell me about Southernmost Region. You should be the most familiar with the people there."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Iron Axe saluted. "Over a half of the land in the Southernmost Region is composed of yellow sand. Oases are scattered along the western side of the desert along Silver Stream. Over 90% of the Mojins live amongst those oases. There's a city built on top of the biggest oasis, which is also the only city in Southernmost Region—Iron Sand City."

"So Silver Stream is a river?"

"It could be counted as half a river." Iron Axe explained. "Most of it is buried underground, just like an underworld Styx's River; the parts that appear above the ground have formed oases. For this reason, the Mojins also call it the River of Life."

Roland turned around, asking curiously, "Where did it come from? Judging from the map, there were no high mountains or lakes near it."

"It originates from the sea, so it's a gift of the Sea God." Iron Axe walked to the desk and pointed at the juncture of the west of Southernmost Region and a piece of green land. "There's a huge limestone cave located here where the sea water constantly flows backward into. One could feel the trembling underneath the feet when standing on the ground."

"Do you mean Silver Stream originates from the sea? But it has bred oases."

Since it breeds oases, it means Silver Stream is freshwater—seawater contains too much salt, which makes it unsuitable for irrigation or drinking. So what Iron Axe said did not make sense.

"Mother Earth absorbed the salt in the seawater. White salt residue can be seen on the ground all over that area, which also isolated the grassland of the Kingdom of Graycastle. When people need salt, they only need to lift a bucket and scoop the salt from the ground."

"Is this the superb craftsmanship of nature? The dirt underneath

the yellow sand filtered the salt and made the area into saline-alkali soil." Roland could not help but exclaim. It seemed that besides petroleum, now he had one more sort of resource to exploit.

"How many residents are there in Iron Sand City?"

"Around 40,000."

"Even more than the old king's city of Graycastle?"

"Your Majesty, the city of the Sand Nation is different from the king's city." Iron Axe smiled. "There's only one nuclear urban area which provides residence for the power-holders of the six clans. The surrounding areas are filled with tents or thatched cottages. After layers of extension, the city became the way you see it now—as soon as one steps onto the oasis, one enters the domain of Iron Sand City."

"Then how about the Mojins that live in other oases? There should be quite a few of them, right?" Roland asked. Human resource was the key to quickly convert the local specialty into a practical resource. But it was unlikely that he would send a lot of people from the city of Neverwinter to mine petroleum, so he had to rely on the locals to work for him.

The commander-in-chief nodded. "There are no statistics about it, but I think there are at least 100,000 residents."

Then I could build several mining stations and one pipeline, which should be enough. The next problem would be deciding how to control the residents.

"Well, last time you mentioned the holy duel. What was it about? How did the Mojins determine the right to rule?"

Iron Axe gave a very detailed reply to those questions. It took almost half an hour before Roland finally understood the Sand Nation's ruling structure and succession.

Putting aside the promotions within the clans, strength was the only thing that was considered trustworthy to those aliens who upheld force. The ruling parties in Iron Sand City were usually constituted by six clans who did not get their powers by inheriting but by fighting with strength. But in order to avoid the clans from losing too many of their own whilst pursuing power, which would consequently weaken their combined strength in the face of external danger, picking a few representatives to duel became their best choice.

Over time, this rule was universally acknowledged over the Sand Nation and was bestowed with a sacred meaning—the big clans which were stationed in Iron Sand City and the newly born small clans that lived in oases all respected the result of the holy duels. Anyone who tarnished the duels would be condemned by all the civilians of Sand Nation.

"Do you mean the prime rulers of the Mojins are the leaders of each clan?" Roland asked in confusion, "Don't you have a figure like the chief?"



"The chief?"

"I mean a leader who rules all the clans, someone like the King of the Kingdom of Graycastle."

"Well..." Iron Axe hesitated. "Among the clans, they used to say that there were two ways that the Sand Nation civilians would obey willingly—one was to get the acknowledgment and blessing of the Three Gods. The other was to open up the unmeasured vastness of oases for the nation to eliminate the overwhelming sandstorm, so as to remove the threats of thirst and death for the Sand Nation."

"The acknowledgment of the Three Gods... How does that work?" Roland asked, frowning.

"In the Land of Fire, one is supposed to offer the sacrifices to the Three Gods who're the Giant Scorpion with Armor that governs the earth, the Unicorn Sea Beast that dominates Southernmost Cape, and the Four-winged Eagle that rules the sky." Iron Axe stopped for a while. "These three beasts appear and disappear mysteriously. They've taken numerous lives yet their dens remain oblivious to the humans. Baits and traps don't work on them—I assume they're some sort of hybrid demonic beasts which might have gained basic wisdom."

"Both ways aren't easy to achieve, especially the second one. To make an oasis out of a desert is almost like the power of God." Roland fell into a deep meditation. By making Echo the chief again

as revenge for being framed five years ago won't help much with my integration of the entire Southernmost Region. Although the six clans have different social status, they don't have a direct affiliation, not to mention those Sand Nation civilians scattered in the oases. I have to find a way to make myself the Grand chief of the Mojin Clan.

Besides, I should also consider the way of the holy duel. The First Army probably could defeat the guards of Iron Sand City like smashing rotten wood, but to make the Sand Nation civilians submit to me willingly isn't that easy.

The most suitable way to annex would be by following the rules made by the Mojin Clan itself.

"Can an outsider be invited to attend the duel?"

"That's not a problem," Iron Axe replied with affirmation, "I'm a mixed-blood, but I could also attend a duel representing the Osha Clan. As a matter of fact, brave gladiators are usually well-liked by the big clans. This is also the only hope for the small clans to have a chance at climbing the ranks—if there are three or four brave warriors among their descendants, they have a better chance to get a good rank during the holy duels."

"Is that so?" Roland said with a smile, "That makes it easier."

# Chapter 684: The First Winter Snow

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Three days later, namely the second day after winter arrived, Barov delivered the message that the Joint Chamber of Commerce contract had been successfully signed.

The result of the negotiation was that Margaret got the dealership of the inner land of the Kingdom of Graycastle; Sunset Island and Shallow Water Town got the dealership of their own lands, Kingdom of Everwinter, and the Kingdom of Wolfheart; Crescent Moon Bay got the dealership of the Fjords islands and the Kingdom of Dawn.

To Roland's surprise, he saw an equation on the contract, which set some conditions into unknown numbers that would be determined according to specific circumstances. In this way, the annual shares could be derived for that year.

"Who wrote this?" Roland asked with curiosity.

"My student," Barov smilingly replied while stroking his beard, "While summarizing the numbers, he found a complex annexed table which could be better expressed by this formula and all three parties agreed with its precision."

"But I remember such a formula wasn't covered by the universal education."

"Didn't Your Majesty start an intermediate class? I bought each of my students a set of maths textbooks and asked them to attend

Lady Scroll's class whenever they had time." Barov exclaimed. "I'm too old to catch up with these young fellas at learning, so I had to leave this opportunity to them. If I were 10 years younger, I would carry these materials that Your Majesty wrote and study them all day."

Roland was very much pleased by this flattery. His minister must have had good foresight if he realized that maths could be helpful to finance and administration.

"How about Edith? How did she perform during this negotiation?"

"Just so-so." Barov coughed twice. "Although those merchants were fascinated by her, when it came to the specific trade terms, she clearly showed a deficiency in experience. I guess she had little contact with maritime merchants. After all, the commerce and trade in the Northern Region are underdeveloped, unlike the old king's city where the Treasurer had to attend to visiting the Fjords merchants every day. There was a time..."

"I see." Noticing Barov was starting to reminisce, Roland immediately interrupted him. "Since that's the case, please put more effort into teaching her."

The old minister was startled. "Um, this... Your Majesty, actually she's..."

"It's decided," Roland said gloatingly. Judging from the frequency that Nightingale pinched the back of his shoulder, he knew that

Barov was not telling the truth. But he did not meddle with such little snitching tricks among his subordinates, as long as they did not screw things up. "Well, what's the increase in population in Neverwinter? Has it reached our expectation?"

Although there was about one month before the end of the year, since the winter had come, the immigrant emissaries would gradually return to Neverwinter so it led to a drastic reduction of people moving away. The current figure would already determine whether the goal of population increase had been realized.

Once this was mentioned, Barov's face expanded into a smile. The wrinkles on his face were almost squeezed into ravines and the awkwardness also vanished into thin air. "Your Majesty, City Hall has made a calculation. The subjects that immigrated from other places exceeded 80,000, with 50% of them coming voluntarily. If we include the natives of the Border Area and the Longsong Area, the population in Neverwinter has now reached 110,000."

"Oh?" Roland was elated. "50% of them came voluntarily?"

"Most of them were from the center area of the kingdom and the Eastern Region. It was not obvious in spring and summer, but in autumn this percentage began to increase. At this rate, those Rebels who support Timothy will become anxious next year."

This must have been a result of Theo spreading the message of the church's defeat in the Eastern Region, but yet Roland had hoped that those nobles would resist longer. He was looking for an excuse to eradicate them altogether so as to give the Eastern Region subjects a stable and orderly new kingdom.

"Have you made preparations for winter?"

"Yes, City Hall completed preparations two months ago," Barov replied with complete confidence, "The Ministry of Construction had entrusted Miss Lotus to build a batch of cave dwellings between the Impassable Mountain Range and Redwater River, in replacement of the air-leak shanties. We've also hoarded a large volume of charcoal to ensure every civilian gets one basket."

After Roland's repeated emphasis, City Hall had finally gotten used to the slogan of "no one freezes or starves to death" as their administrative goal and implementing it to every policy.

Roland nodded with gratification and said, "Good. Please pass my word to Scroll and tell her not to forget about education during winter."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Besides, I plan to wage a minor scale war on the premise, obviously without affecting the normal operation of Neverwinter. My target is the Southernmost Region. When Iron Axe has done the specific battle plan, please coordinate with him to assemble the supplies." Looking at Barov who was hesitating about replying, Roland walked to him and patted him on the shoulder. "Don't worry. I've everything under control."

...

After Barov left, Nightingale showed herself. She asked with bewilderment, "Are you sure this is alright? What he said about Edith was clearly far from reality. One doesn't have to use magic power to figure that out."

"But if I criticize him for that, he may never dare to suppress Edith openly again," Roland said with his hands laid out, "In order to maintain the balance in City Hall, there has to be someone who can restrain the Pearl of the Northern Region. As far as I know, Barov is the only one capable of that."

"But why do you want to restrain her? If she has the capability of managing City Hall, it wouldn't do you any harm."

"Because..." Roland opened his mouth but did not know what to say.

Right, why would I want Edith to be restrained?

Am I worried about her getting too strong?

That's highly unlikely. As long as I'm the king, I could get her replaced with one word. Besides, City Hall isn't allowed to interfere with the army, so even if she controlled all the departments of City Hall, she would still not pose a threat to my throne.

As a matter of fact, since all the employees in City Hall were

selected according to the recruitment notices and paid by the treasury, the possible influence caused by replacing a manager would be minimized.

Am I worried that she would go behind everybody's back to falsify my policies?

At least it would not happen in Neverwinter because all the comments on his policies would reach Roland's ears. And since the city's area was limited, messages traveled in real-time.

Before he arrived in this world, check-and-balance was the method that he hated the most. Especially in his workplace, his boss regarded it as the Monarchy trickery, and thus he viewed his boss with contempt. But when he came to power, he began to realize its importance... If Nightingale had not reminded him, maybe he would have become the kind of person that he hated the most.

Indeed, check-and-balance was needed but it should not be achieved by playing the game of powers with another person or several other persons. Instead, it should be regulated by policies, structure and laws. Without violating any of these frameworks, an employee should be encouraged to put his or her ability into full play.

Roland let out a deep breath and curled his lips. He was about to thank Nightingale for her reminder when he realized she was staring outside of the window wholeheartedly.



"Look, it's snowing." She whispered.

Roland looked over and found that countless white flakes silently appeared from the gray sky and slowly descended as soft-footed elves.

The Months of Demons had begun.

# Chapter 685: Overwhelming Disaster

Translator: TransN Editor: Meh

Underground Pivotal Secret Temple, the Holy City of Hermes

Tayfun had not slept well for over two consecutive months.

Every time he closed his eyes, the screams of Ayr Archbishop would reverberate in his ears. She had got shot in her stomach by the enemy's weapon and been dragged back by the Judgement Army. All her intestines had been in a mess, and no herbal treatment in the holy city had been able to cure her wound. After two days' struggle, she had finally died in great pain.

Tayfun had become skeptical about the Graycastle's real power when the church's spearhead led by Soli Daal had suffered a sharp defeat. He had repeatedly suggested His Holiness Mayne think twice and do more investigation before the action, but the Pope had remained unmoved and ordered the church's main force to immediately launch an attack against the defense line of Graycastle at the foot of Coldwind Ridge.

He had expected that the church was going to pay a price for this hasty decision, but he had never thought that it would be such a terrible price.

More unexpectedly, the church's elite troop, the invincible God's Punishment Army had also been defeated.

The moment he had heard this unbelievable news, he had coughed out blood and passed out on the top floor of the Tower of Babel.

He had found out more inconceivable things after that.

None of the Pure Witches had come back and His Holiness Mayne had been no where to be found after the war. Not until he had taken a bold decision to break into the Pivotal Secret Area had he known the truth from the guards there.

They had told him that Mayne was not the real successor of His Holiness O'Brien and the one who had received scepter and crown from the previous Pope was Pure Witch Zero.

Given that, the Holy City had even lost the Pope at that moment.

Under such circumstances, the only thing that Tayfun had been able to do was to keep this secret underground forever. He had made all the people who had come down here with him join the Pivotal Secret Temple. He himself had started to serve as the Pope temporarily.

In the following month, Tayfun had spent all his time on restoring the order of the Holy City and reading the secret history stored in the Library.

His reading had enabled him to know all the truth, including the secret reasons for hunting and killing witches, the creation of

God's Punishment Warriors, the origin of the church and the collapse of the witches' empire.

These records had overthrown his worldview.

He had never thought even in his wildest dreams that the church had been built by witches.

Such a powerful witch empire ruling the whole Barbarian Land still failed to eliminate the demons. What about the church? The God's Punishment Army and the Sigils of Magic Stones we treasure are nothing but a legacy of those exiled ancient witches.

Tortured by these unsettling thoughts, he had quickly fallen into a torpor. After two months which had seemed like two years to him, his face had become heavily wrinkled like the old Bishop and his movement slow like a dying man.

However, knowing that if he fell down now, the church would be finished, he had kept on working and refused to stop.

He had promoted many soldiers of the reserve force as Judgement Warriors and chosen new Archbishops from middle-ranking believers at the fastest speed. He had called on his people to defend the Holy City to the last man, stabilizing the situation at a very difficult time.

However, he himself was clear about all the troubles behind the stable facade. Nothing could rapidly compensate for the loss of the

God's Punishment Army. The young soldiers from the reserve force could hardly compete with the experienced warriors in terms of fighting capacity. If it was during peace-time, he would get a chance to make up for the loss; but now Months of Demons were approaching, if he could not stop demonic beasts, the church would have no future.

To survive the coming Months of Demons, he planned to assemble all the nobles' troops in Wolfheart and in Everwinter to defend the Holy City in the same way the Four Kingdoms had jointly defended on the Hermes defense line before.

He expected that it would not be an easy thing. When those nobles who still kept their domains and knights got the news about the church's defeat, they would probably plan to fight against the church again. Given that, after most of the Graycastle's army left the Northern Region, he sent out the remaining God's Punishment Army of over 100 soldiers in the Holy City to the kingdoms with the emissary delegations as a means of forcing the nobles to obey his orders.

After those God's Punishment Warriors left, both the old and new Holy Cities' defense was weak as never before.

Now, Tayfun had no choice but to pray that the emissary delegations would bring Hermes reinforcements before demonic beasts started to attack.

He rubbed his sore eyes and closed the ancient book about the incarnation ceremony of God's Punishment Warriors. When he was about to make himself some coltsfoot tea to relieve his

headache, he heard an outburst of fighting sounds.

Trembling with shock, he dropped his teacup and smashed it into the ground.

How come invaders could get here?

With this question in mind, he walked to the window and looked down. In the dim light of the prism of magic stone, he saw a crowd of people continue to move toward Pivotal Secret Temple.

They were incredibly fast and killed every guard who came up to stop them with only one strike. The guards' armors seemed completely useless in protecting them from the invaders' blades. Soon, the grayish-white steps were covered with blood and the invaders arrived at the gate of the temple in the blink of an eye.

At this moment, he heard a loud bang on the door. A Praetorian Guard rushed in and said to him, "Your Eminence, Pivotal Secret Temple is under attack. Please leave right now!" This guard was the Pope' bodyguard. He was followed by a dozen God's Punishment Warriors.

Tayfun shouted in a hoarse voice, "how did they get in here?"

He could not believe what he saw. "To come down to this underground area, they've got to take the cage or get through the secret stronghold of the old Holy City. Nobody, even the soldiers of the Graycastle, can unobtrusively capture both the old and the new

Holy Cities and control the entrances to this place unless they have wings!"

The Praetorian Guard looked pale. "The enemies are from the depths of the cave. Please, Your Eminence, come with me immediately. Otherwise, it'll be too late."

"The depths of... the cave?" Tayfun echoed in disbelief, as he knew that place had nothing except some circular holes.

Shocked and puzzled, he followed the Praetorian Guard to a secret tunnel along the wall and quickly got to the bottom floor of the temple.

The Praetorian Guard opened a stone trapdoor at a corner and said to him, "Your Eminence, as no one guards the cage, it may not be a safe passage now. I'll escort you to the tunnel leading to the old Holy City. Please take more people here to defend the Pivotal Secret Temple as soon as possible."

When he got of the tunnel, his heart sank to the bottom.

A dozen invaders already waited there with their swords, seeming to have known they would come out from there.

A man came up and said, "I thought I would never get a chance to set foot in the Holy City again. The successors of the Queen of Starfall City are nothing more than this." He wore strange-looking armors which looked like a stack of sheetmetal and carried a sword

whose blade was stained with black-blue blood.

When Tayfun fixed his eyes on the man's face, all his blood froze in a second.

He had seen this man before.

"He's Ellington, the Chief Justice of the Sixth Legion's advance force. This brave man volunteered to join God's Punishment Army three years ago. Before he went to his incarnation ceremony, he came to say goodbye to me," Tayfun recalled.

He felt that a strange chillness crept up through his spine and burrowed into his head. Terror seized him and made it hard for him to move his tongue.

"Wh-What... monsters... are you?"



# Chapter 686: The Legacy of Deities

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The man who looked like Ellington sneered, "monster? Isn't this body created by you? You made this kind of extraordinary warrior with the witches' blood and God's Stones of Retaliation, but unfortunately, they were defective. Because of the lack of key steps, they don't have souls, but you still placed great hope on them. You believe these soulless semi-finished products can compete with demons on the battlefields, but now when you see a real finished product you call it a 'monster'? "

"A real... finished product?" Tayfun's heart began to thump, as he found this man seemed to know better than himself the process of creating God's Punishment Army, a top secret of the church.

"All-out attack, kill them all!" the Praetorian Guard ordered.

The ten God's Punishment Warriors following him quickly came to the front to protect the Archbishop. They moved incredibly fast, lunging at the invaders.

However, these invaders were also God's Punishment Warriors and even stronger than them.

They did not outnumber the church's warriors, but they fought much more skillfully. They lured them close and broke them apart. Every time one of the church's warriors was fighting against someone in front of him, he would soon get attacked from behind. Under such circumstances, even Tayfun could tell it was better to retreat. However, a church's warrior would not know how to react

unless his controller, the Praetorian Guard, gave him further orders. Controlling 10 warriors at the same time, the guard was unable to take care of every situation in this fight, so the church's warriors were clearly at a disadvantage to the invaders who were equally strong but could act independently.

These extraordinary warriors of the church soon lost their combat capability when they were separated.

The invaders quickly killed them all without any casualties.

The leader of the invaders, "Ellington", easily hacked the Praetorian Guard to death at the end of the fight. After that, he lifted his sword and put it on the old Bishop's shoulder, who was standing petrified with shock.

The black-blue blood of the church's God's Punishment Warriors and the red blood of the Praetorian Guard mixed on the blade and dripped into Tayfun's collar.

Tayfun said with a trembling voice, "you... can't kill me. If I die, the Holy City will collapse... When that happens, who will stop the demonic beasts? If they break through the defense line of Hermes, I'm afraid the four kingdoms will fall into—"

The leader of the invaders interrupted, "fall into ruins? Save it. You can deceive ignorant believers with this story, but we know what those demonic beasts are looking for. If it was not you that brought them here, why would those dumb beasts swarm to this trap of ice and snow during Months of Demons when the magic

power is at its peak every year?"

"What... I don't understand what you mean..."

This leader looking like Ellington shrugged and said, "what? It seems that you've not even seen the relic. What a pity."

The bishop was about to say something, but suddenly he felt cold in his neck. Soon endless torpor and coldness occupied his mind.

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Elena kicked the old man's head up, sending it flying and saw his body slowly fall down to the ground. She took back her sword in satisfaction and said, "let's go. Time to finish our task."

Someone pulled her back from behind, saying, "wait, you're hurt. Stop the bleeding first, or your body will get out of control."

"Where's the wound?"

"In your waist. You've got to take off the armors first."

Elena cursed, "this damn body. It doesn't feel a thing at all." She took off her chest and back armors, revealing a well-built upper body.

"Gee, look at this. It would cost at least fifty gold royals back in Taquila. To be honest, have you ever looked into the mirror and..."

The one who was treating Elena's wound interrupted, "come on, Betty. Isn't that kind of fantasies like torture for us? I don't even dare to recall the days in Taquila. As compared to the life in the past, my life now resembles being imprisoned in a cage of endless void."

Someone immediately agreed with her, saying, "Carol is right. If someone can make me feel what it's like to sleep with a man again, I'll give anything to marry him... No, I'll even treat him as my lord."

"A man? Come on. I'll be satisfied if I can eat delicious fried steak with butter again."

"I just want to do some sunbathing..."

"Damn it, who brought up this subject?"

"Miss Betty."

"I just wanted to make some casual conversations. This is the body I wanted to have in the first place..."

Elena got a little upset and shouted, "stop it! Don't forget the purpose of our trip! The others were still waiting for us at the top of the tower. Concentrate your mind!"

She led the team into the secret tunnel after Carol finished treating the wound.

They got up to the library through the tunnel. Another group of witches looking like God's Punishment Warriors were waiting there.

These witches were the remaining members of the Union.

Elena sighed in her heart, "lady Natalya, have you seen? We win in the end."

She asked, "have you found the location of the relic?"

Zoe, the leader of the other team, came up and said, "the old place. Everything is arranged in the same way as that in the Holy City of Taquila. By the way, why did you spend so much time down there? Are you sure that you didn't let go of a person?"

Elena coughed twice and said, "of course, everything went well, so by agreement..."

"We'll touch the relic together."

She nodded, saying, "that's it. Let's get started."

This relic, the deities' legacy, was the origin of Battles of Divine

Will and the top secret of the Union. In fact, before the collapse of the witches' empire, none of them had known about it. When the old order had disintegrated and they had hidden underground, all the survivors like them had finally heard it from the Three Chiefs.

From then on, they had become equals and formed a classless group searching for the way of defeating demons, as they had been clear that each and every survivor of the Union would have been equally important in this process.

Thinking that she was going to touch an object created by deities, Elena felt her heart was beating faster.

However, she knew it was just an illusion, as she could feel nothing in this body.

Following Zooey, she walked through a trapdoor behind a book shelf and got up to the top of the library.

Up there, she saw a narrow room without a window, which had nothing inside except a Magic Stone giving out dim blue light above her head.

"Is this the Prayer Room mentioned by Pasha?"

"Yes." Zooey lifted up an iron hammer and smashed it against the wall. With a dull thud, it left only a small white spot on the wall.

"It doesn't seem to be here." she said and chose another position

to hammer. After several attempts, the wall area opposite to the entrance cracked.

"Find it! Come here to help me," Zooey said.

Elena drew out her long sword and came up. They struck at the wall together and soon opened a gap which was half their height.

Looking at the gap, they found that the broken wall was almost as thick as half an arm's length and both sides of the wall were brushed with a thick layer of mortar. Given that, they could never find this section of hollow wall simply by knocking at the walls and listening to the knocking sound. Looking through the gap, they found a even smaller secret chamber instead of another passage leading to the underground.

In this chamber, Elena saw the relic of deities.

# Chapter 687: The Secret of the Relic

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The relic was a piece of transparent carmine crystal. Similar to the magic core in the maze ruins, it was also a spindle apparatus, but it was much smaller, only half a man's height.

When Elena stepped into the chamber, however, it looked different. Its smooth spherical surface changed into a sharp right angle. From above, it seemed to be a quarter a sphere.

It stayed afloat by itself in the air as the magic core did, which proved it was uncommon.

"Is this the thing that determines the fate of the mankind?" Elena thought.

She was filled with doubts and at the same time felt a little irritated about the deities.

According to Pasha, no one knew how it had appeared in this world, but the moment it had come, it had been bound to the fate of human beings. If the mankind loses it, all people including witches and the common people would die in an instant. In order to protect the relic, countless people had fought bloody battles against demons and died on the battlefield. Seeing the suffering of the mankind, deities, however, had never given people any instruction. They just kept watching what was happening in silence, waiting for the ultimate winner.

Elena felt disgusted at this game.



At this moment, Zooey asked her, "are you ready? Remember what Pasha said to us? Control our minds and never try to connect with the deities when moving the relic."

Elena replied with a nod, "don't worry. I remember. I'll count to three and then we'll move it together?"

Zooey gestured a "yes".

"One, two, three." They lifted the relic while moving outward. It could float in the air, but was not as light as a feather. With a strong body of a God's Punishment Warrior, Elena still felt it very heavy on her arm when she lifted it. It was exhausting.

If Pasha had never told her the truth about this feeling, she would have been thinking that it's her senses long time forgotten coming back to her after hundreds of years.

This "sense of fatigue" was mental.

The relic attempted to connect with them.

Elena shook her head, trying to banish those thoughts, but suddenly she remembered that she should not empty her mind. Given that, she thought she had better think about something during this process.

What should I think now? A man... or tasty food... or a soft bed?

A voice got into her mind all of a sudden. "What you want is feelings, comfort, happiness, pains, coldness, hotness, and so on. I can give them to you. Relax and look at me..."

"What to look at? No, no!" Elena's eyes widened in surprise. "Who's talking? Is it the relic?"

She turned to look at Zooey and found her eyes dull. Now she seemed like an empty shell without a soul.

"Damn it, what's going on? Pasha didn't tell us that something like this would happen!" Elena thought anxiously.

The voice in her head started again. "Don't worry, she just follows her own heart and integrates into me."

'Let her out!'

"I can't. You must come in to take her out..." The voice in her head started to change, from a raucous sound to a soft female voice. For a moment, she could not tell whether she was communicating with the relic or with herself.

"Get in to take her out?"

At this moment, Pasha's warning flashed across her mind.

"Never try to connect with the deities."

But she could not just stand by seeing Zooey lose her mind. A shell without a soul would die soon. Given that, she decided to pull Zooey out of the relic first.

"I just need to look at the relic?" she wondered.

She took a deep breath and then looked at the carmine crystal.

She saw it distorting, and then darkness possessed her. When she started to see things again, she found she was in a totally different world.

It was an incredibly lofty and spacious hall. Its dome was the scene of a starry sky with a Bloody Moon in it. She could see magic power flowing on the surface of the Bloody Moon like boiling lava, and then four giant paintings silently draped and surrounded her.

The hall, the Bloody Moon and the paintings filled her with awe beyond description. She had only heard about this world from Pasha. This was the first time for her to witness such an unbelievable scene.

"Zooey! Where are you?" she shouted.

But no one answered.

The paintings were the only things in the hall now.

She forced herself to calm down and look at the paintings.

Immediately after she cast a glance at them, she felt her back was covered with cold sweats, as she found they were looking back at her at the same time.

In the first painting, she saw a demon wearing fine armors stood up from its throne. Its pupils were giving out dreadful red light, and it was moving toward her step by step.

In the second painting, she saw a giant eye, in which there were many pupils arraying in a triangle shape in the eyeball. They opened at the same time like giant mouths that were going to devour people up.

She could not help moving backward, but she still encouraged herself in silence, "don't panic. They are just moving pictures."

However, she lost her composure in just a few seconds.

All of a sudden, six or seven black tentacles which had small hands at the end poked out from those two paintings, trying to grab her.

Too frightened to react, she was caught by them.

Each group of tentacles tried their best to pull her into their own painting, not wanting to give her to the other group as if she were a rare trophy. Hung between the two painting, she felt she was going to be torn apart. The unbearable pain made her scream.

Wait... I feel the pain?

At this moment, she was shocked to find her appearance had changed back to a witch again.

So the last feeling I get before death is the pain of being torn apart. That's alright... at least, I won't die in an empty shell, in a God's Punishment Warrior's body. Her consciousness slowly escaped her as the pain increased.

Before she blacked out, she found something strange in another painting.

She saw that the God's Punishment Warrior shell she had was lying on the ground with twitching limbs, and Zooey was holding her legs and dragging her toward a trap door.

She wondered, "what's going on? Didn't that silly girl merge with the relic?"

Right at the moment, the hall collapsed instantly. The Bloody Moon, the paintings, the tentacles and her pain all disappeared in a sudden. She blinked her eyes and found she was in the library

again.

"Is that a... dream?" she murmured.

Zooey gnashed her teeth and said, "what dream? You really disappointed me. Remember what Pasha told you? Never try to connect with the deities! I reminded you before we moved the relic!"

"But I saw you lose your mind..."

Zooey interrupted impatiently, "and I saw you being swallowed by the relic. It was nothing but an illusion created by the deities! If I didn't pull you out, you would stay inside forever."

Thinking of the powerful tentacles, the demon and the giant eye in the paintings, Elena found it hard to believe they were just illusions. She still felt uncertain. Since Pasha had never personally experienced the relic, it was reasonable that she had not reminded her of those illusions. However, based on what she had experienced just now in the relic, it was not an illusion at all, as the things in the painting had noticed her the moment she had glanced at them.

Betty interrupted, "sorry, I don't mean to butt in, but what should we do next?"

Zooey glanced at Elena again and said, "someone else need to come here to help me move the relic out. The Prayer Room has

been broken in. We've got to put the relic into the God's Stone box as soon as possible, otherwise, those demonic beasts will follow us to the underground caves."

# Chapter 688: Arrival at the Western Region

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After nearly half a month, the ship finally reached the Western Region.

The north wind became much stronger after they sailed past Willow Town. Lying in the cabin of the ship, No. 76 could still hear the sound of the sail fluttering in the strong wind.

"It's snowing outside!"

Amy excitedly ran into the cabin with some snow in her cupped hands, but before she showed it to No. 76, it had melted into shimmering water drops and dripped through her fingers. "Everything outside is white. I've never seen such a big snow."

No. 76 struggled to sit up in her soft bed and said, "really? It seldom snows in the City of Glow in the Kingdom of Dawn."

Meanwhile, she thought to herself, "but it wasn't a rare thing for Taquila. Every year in Months of Demons, we needed to clean up the snow repeatedly, which was pretty tiresome; but fortunately, the demons would postpone their attack during this period of time, making this white scenery more adorable."

Amy said with a big smile, her eyes in the shape of a crescent moon, "I know. The city of Glow is warm as spring all the year



round. Do you want to go to the deck to have a look? I can carry you out."

"Stop it. Her wounds haven't recovered yet. She can't stand cold winds," Broken Sword interrupted, who was decocting some medicinal herbs aside.

"Oh... sorry."

No. 76 shook her head and said, "it's fine. What about enjoying the snow together when I recover? His Majesty's city is more on the west side than here. We are going to see more beautiful snow scenes there."

Hearing this, the two witches by her bed looked sad, but Amy quickly dispelled her sadness and nodded to No. 76 vigorously. "No problem. I promise."

No. 76 was not surprised seeing them feel sad for her. As she had a God's Punishment Warrior's body, all the superficial wounds she got would heal in three or four days. In order to cover up her identity, she had smashed her own thighbones and elbow to prevent this body from having a perfect recovery. By doing so, she made the others believe that it was lucky enough for her to survive. They all thought that if she failed to meet a witch who could heal her in the Western Region, she would not be able to move around by herself and spend the rest of her life suffering from physical disability and mental distress.

They had no idea that this body was merely a tool to complete a

mission for No. 76, and as soon as she went back to her underground maze , she would get a new one. Facts proved that the story she had made up was very convincing. She could tell from Annie's eyes and actions that she felt guilty seeing her seriously injured, and the other witches all showed trust and gratitude to her, especially Amy. Since they had escaped from the "Black Money" together, this little girl had taken her as a companion and almost followed her everywhere. Every night, she would come to No. 76 and coax her to sleep by telling her folktales in a soft voice.

However, every time this little girl would fall asleep before No. 76 did.

No. 76 was satisfied seeing this result, as she needed the witches' trust. In this way, she would get to know more witches and find out the Chosen One, which was the mission Pasha had given her.

Broken Sword walked to her bed with an earthen jar in her hands, saying, "time to change your wound dressing. You may feel a little pain, so it's better to close your eyes."

"Don't worry. I can take it. You can start now." No. 76 pretended to be suffering from a great pain by clenching her teeth, but in order to react properly, she did not close her eyes. As she had no feelings, if she did not look at it, she would never know whether Broken Sword began to dress her wound or not.

The herbal medicine out of the jar looked like sticky mud. From the looks on the faces of Amy and Broken Sword, she knew it must smell bad.

Applying the stuff all over her wounds in such a tightly enclosed small cabin was not an easy task for the witches.

After the treatment was finally done, No. 76 heaved a sigh of relief and lay back in her bed, sweating.

She had quickened her heartbeat to raise her body temperature and speed her blood flow, making herself break into a sweat. Together with her trembling limbs and facial expressions of pain, she made everyone believe that she was suffering.

She did not care at all whether this common people's remedy would work for her wounds or not.

After a long while, she said, "thank you."

Amy picked up a towel to wipe the sweat on her forehead, saying, "no, don't say that. This is what we owe you. We are the ones who should say thank you."

Broken Sword added, "Amy is right. Have a good rest. When we arrive at Neverwinter, everything will be all right."

When they left, No. 76 touched the magic stone ring on her chest, which she had hid under her clothes, and slightly sighed, lost in thoughts.

Only when we find the the Chosen One, everything will really be all right.

If we fail to defeat demons, all of us will die. No one can escape from the predestined war, the upcoming Battle of Divine Will.

However, until now we still have no idea whether the Chosen One exists or not.

In accordance with the descriptions in the remaining documents in the maze ruins, magic power was a gift bestowed on uncommon people by the deities. Everyone who could use it must have a Key to unlock the Source of Magic Power. That was why only a few could use this prevailing power.

More importantly, each Key was different.

Some witches were extremely powerful, who could summon strong storms or make the dead come back to life, but some were only able to use their power to cook a bowl of oatmeal or mend broken clothes.

What caused such great differences among the Awakened?

This question had baffled the Union for hundreds of years until the remaining witches of the Union had found the documents in the maze ruins. By studying those records, they had found a vague explanation for this phenomenon.

The differences in the witches' abilities and power were caused by the differences between their Keys.

A Key had nothing to do with a witch's magic capacity but was closely related to the essence of the magic power. Every time a witch used her ability, she would turn part of the magic power into reality. As this was an extremely complicated process which could not be completed by the witch alone. The deities would also take part in it.

However, as the deities had a preference for some witches, the Keys varied in terms of how complex the processes were. Some were very simple, but some were exceptionally complicated. A Key's complexity determined the upper limit of the amount of magic power a witch could use.

No. 76 had not quite understood this explanation until Pasha had given her an example, the Magic Stones. A witch could use them to realize various magic effects without any change in her own Magic Cyclone. That meant the magic power used by different witches who had various abilities was actually the same thing. No matter she was an Extraordinary or a Senior Witches, she used the same power.

If that was the case, would it be possible that witches had a chance to prevail demons when there was an omniscient Magic Stone that could enable witches to realize any effect they wanted?

A magic core worked just like this. It mimicked the workings of a Magic Cyclone, trying to ask for power from the deities directly. In some sense, it could be considered as an extremely powerful man-

made Magic Stone, way stronger than the Sigils, simple and crude toys as compared to a magic core, which could only increase a witch's power. However, experiment results showed that deities would never give a Key to a lifeless thing. Only a witch who had a matching Key could activate this thing.

Such a witch was the Chosen One.

# Chapter 689: First Contact

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Using this colorful magic stone ring, No. 76 could observe the "dialogue" a witch had with God as she performed magic.

This dialogue appeared as a pale orange light which connected the witch with the vast sky.

According to the documented records, demons and some hybrid demonic beasts could produce the same type of orange light.

God did not show tender care for the world.

Every time she thought about this, she became worried.

When compared to the innumerable demons, the witches were not as powerful a nation. Their powers could not be inherited and also could not be cultivated. The only way of awakening a witch's power was luck. Moreover, their magic powers were weaker than that of the enemies.

Fortunately, the Key was not a predestined thing.

They could change the Key through a High Awakening. By doing this, they could receive a more powerful force through God.

Since leaving the Kingdom of Dawn, No.76 had observed the orange lights of Amy, Annie, and Hero. Hero was the strongest of

them, while Annie was the weakest. However, in general, the differences between the three was negligible. They were all about the same size, the width of a finger, and they were all far away from the request of starting the Instrument of Divine Retribution.

She had reasons to believe that a Senior Witch was the Chosen One.

The cabin door opened suddenly and Yorko, the Ambassador of Graycastle, entered. He arched his eyebrows, went to the bedside and said, "The smell of this herb is more nauseating than the latrine. Why would someone use such a malodorous thing in medicine?"

"Maybe the sailors thought that the demonic plague could be cured by its pungent smell," No.76 said as she smiled smugly. "Regardless, my body feels better and my wound is just a scar now."

Of course, this had nothing to do with the medicine, rather, it depended on the individual bodies of the wonderful God's Punishment Army.

"If it's useless, I'm going to absolutely put their heads into the latrine. So they can become familiar with the smell of this medicine." Yorko chose a bench and sat down.

"Those poor sailors," she whispered. "Amy told me that you asked them if they had any special prescriptions."



"Ahem. Lying to a noble is a grave crime and they can only blame themselves," the ambassador said. "If you can't get a real answer, just tell them to drink it with hot water and honey. Even if it doesn't cure their wound, they will still leave smiling and satisfied. Oh... I'm not referring to you!"

No.76 smiled with abandon. During the long boat trip, Yoko visited her at least once a day. The visits were short, but they always had a nice talk. She thought that perhaps Yorko was an average person, but when he spent time with a woman, he was more humorous than many of the other nobles. Even if they were in Taquila, he would have become famous. After she lost most of her senses, verbal communication had become one of the most pleasant ways to pass the time.

After chatting for a while, the ambassador unusually became quiet.

No.76 thought for a moment before she propped up her body with one hand and tentatively asked, "Sir, do you need me to serve you? Although my body is inflexible..."

"I've said it many times before, you aren't my maid. Don't use the word 'serve' every time you meet with others. You're a free person in Graycastle now, understand?" He held his forehead and said, "You're still wounded and I'm not one of those upper nobles who have a morbid addiction."

"So, you just want to talk with me?"

After hearing that, Yorko's facial expression changed a little. He cleared his throat and said, "Er... Actually, I have a question to ask you. After you arrive at King's City, what do you plan to do?"

"Er... Go to a tavern and become a maid? Maybe work at the gambling house, that would also be OK." No.76 tilted her head as she said, "That is if the witch can finally cure my body."

If she could stay in Neverwinter, she would be able to do anything. She had gained the trust of the witches of the Kingdom of Dawn, so she would finally get a chance to become familiar with other members of the Witch Union.

"You should do something else," Yorko dissuaded her, "since you are free, you should try something new."

"How? The 'Black Money' only taught me how to serve men. Although I wanted to become a guard, my repaired limb won't be as flexible as before."

"The people from Neverwinter will teach you. I heard from His Majesty that his kingdom provides everyone with formal work." Yorko said, before pausing... "If you meet with any difficulties in the future, you can come to me at any time, as long as I haven't left."

"Did he hesitate for so long time, only to say these words to me" No.76 couldn't help feeling a little emotional. When she was in the Kingdom of Dawn, she clearly saw how troubled a person he is. Perhaps making a promise like this was difficult for him.

"Um... I'll try." She lowered her head before saying, "Thank you!"

...

After four days had passed, the sailors brought good news. They had finally reached the new city in the western region of Graycastle—Neverwinter.

The witches all gathered in No.76's room, they were anxious and waiting for their next order. Among them all, Annie was the most anxious. She opened the window and glanced at the dock every now and then. If she found something worrisome, she would get everyone to jump into the cold river without thinking.

But, No.76 felt it was too noisy, the loud bugle was incessant and the river continually lashed the side of the ship and there were like a thousand other boats floating around them.

"It's the Months of Demons now. Even though it is summer, how is the dock so busy?"

However, she couldn't move, so she couldn't see the scene outside her window.

"Where are the sails on these boats, Sister Annie?" Amy was asked in astonishment.

"Maybe the sailors are rowing under the deck." Annie suddenly stopped and leaned against the window, "Be quiet! Someone is coming!"

Broken Sword felt anxious and asked, "How many people are out there?"

"Only four people, I don't think they noticed us." Annie knitted her brow, "And... they're all women."

"They're all witches?" Amy stood up suddenly, "I knew that Mr. Ambassador hadn't lied to us!"

"The members of the Bloodfang Association are all witches, but they aren't the same as us," she said in a low voice, "essentially, just follow my non-verbal orders like before."

"OK!" Everyone nodded.

Soon someone knocked on the door and the four girls entered the room. The leader was a red-haired lady. "Welcome to Neverwinter, sisters!" she said with a smile.

Annie was astonished, she hadn't thought they would be so friendly. Even No.76 looked surprised. Although in Taquila the witches were abundant, they were not friendly enough to welcome a newly awakened witch... "Do they even differentiate the witches abilities?"

The fact a combat witch could be compared to a non-combat witch was an unrespectable thing.

At that moment, No.76 suddenly found a blonde-haired girl looking directly at her. Her beautiful smile confirmed her identity and her sharp eyes seemed to see through them all.

# Chapter 690: Witches vs. Witches

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No. 76 pretended to be timid and shifted her head.

She had prepared to be examined by the Witch Union if she wanted to have contact with them. The Union knew the abilities of the witches the most, and it was normal that an organization with such a large scale had some detective means like the sense of magic and Magic Stone of Observation. She had no need to trek to the Western Region of Graycastle if she could not pass the examination.

Different from the senseless God's Punishment Army soldiers, she could easily control every part of her body and the release of anti-magic areas. Any witch could master this skill after two or three years' practice. As long as she did not use her magic power to cause any distorted barrier, she would appear the same as common people.

After all, the anti-magic areas and the blue blood of the God's Punishment Warriors were all caused by the magic power. If they were senseless, they would behave like beasts and fight by the instinct of the transformers. They naturally did not know how to use the ubiquitous magic power, either. Only after the shell was possessed by a witch's soul, it would be fully utilized. Even though the witch could not cohere the Magic Cyclone as in the past, and would lose her combat instinct, the immortal soul could gain power and skills no worse than the Extraordinary through years of training.

"Why don't you... ask about our abilities first?" Annie asked after

a long silence. Obviously, she was extremely wary of them.

No. 76 was equally intrigued to know their answer. During the journey, she had a deeper understanding of the suffering of Annie and other witches. She heard that Annie was once refused by a witch organization due to her ability defect and was almost sold by them to the nobles.

It was well understandable for No. 76 that the combat witches were highly valued. Especially when the wild witches were severely suppressed by the Starfall City, self-protection and protection of the organization were necessary means of sustaining the organization. However, it also indicated that these witches just had a primary understanding of the magic power. The High Awakening could bring great changes to some non-combat witches after their promotion, and their seemingly useless abilities could experience transcendent transformation. Therefore, it was an extremely stupid choice for the Bloodfang Association to refuse the non-combat witches and even sell them to the nobles.

But it was also too weird if they did not care about the abilities at all. It could be described as jumping from one extreme to another one. After all, High Awakening was always rare, and thousands of witches could not be promoted throughout their lives, not to mention that the combat witches also had the promotion opportunity. Therefore, in any case, the status of combat witches was always higher. Their equal treatment was simply incredible in the eyes of No. 76.

No wonder Annie would be so wary of them.

"The ability test is usually arranged in three days," the red-haired witch laughed softly and said, "after all, you must be tired after such a long journey. We'll wait until you have a full rest, so the test results will be more accurate. What do you think of it? By the way, my name is Wendy, and I'm in charge of the Witch Union. You can come to me if you have any questions later."

Annie did not relax at her words. She continued to ask, "What if the test shows that... our abilities are useless?"

The witch, who claimed herself as Wendy gently responded, "Both His Majesty Roland and the Witch Union hold the notion that 'there is no useless power'. I know what you're worried about, and this is a process which most witches joining Neverwinter will experience. In fact, an ability test is just for His Majesty to know your situation better. It doesn't mean that you have to be a member of the union."

Annie was stunned. "What do you mean?"

"It means that, even if you don't want to work for His Majesty, you can still live in the city like common people."

No. 76's heart skipped a beat at her words, as she knew that emergence of Senior Witches relied heavily on a relaxing environment. For example, in Taquila, every witch could practice her ability as she wished, and anyone with even a little talent would be specially cultivated by the Union. In the Holy City where the more the witches were in charge, the more witches were promoted to get a higher ability.



And if a witch had to flee from a place to another and lived in horror, she even had few opportunities to practice her ability, then how could she be promoted? If they were not lying, and Neverwinter indeed provided the witches with a free and stable life, then they really had the conditions for the birth of Senior Witches in a sense.

Maybe the Chosen One was not among them now, but what about several years later? No. 76 was full of thoughts now. "Maybe I should find an opportunity to talk with the Witch Union in private and it's the best choice to make them a branch of the Union."

"Can I choose not to work for the King?" Annie seemed not to believe what she had heard.

"Yes, Witch Union won't force any sister to sign the contract. But if you're a member of the union, you'll benefit so much and your work will also be easy, so everybody joins this family now."

"Sorry, Lady Wendy..." Broken Sword said, "Can you tell us what a witch's daily job is?"

"Don't call me Lady," Wendy shook her head with a smile. "We're sisters, aren't we? As for work, it depends on your ability. For example, Miss Evelyn can brew delicious wine, so she opens a wine factory in the city. And Miss Mystery Moon is responsible for the light in the factory, as she can magnetize objects. And Miss Nana Pine... Her excellent healing ability makes her an angel in

Neverwinter. I heard from Mr. Ambassador that some of you need curing, right?"

"She didn't give any examples related to combat witches," No. 76 frowned and thought, "Don't they care about the differences between the abilities of the witches? Then how did the king of Graycastle defeat the God's Punishment Army of the church?"

"Can you really cure the feet of Hero?" Amy immediately became excited.

"We have to let Nana try first," Wendy nodded to the blonde witch. "But before that, can you introduce your backgrounds and names?"

No. 76 did not care about whether she could be cured. Instead, she had focused on the other four witches.

The colorful magic stone on her chest became slightly hot, which meant that someone was using magic power. The heat was not from the skin contact, but a direct response of the soul.

She realized that the examination started.

From Annie to Hero, everyone briefly told their past story. Wendy also raised several questions, while the older brunette witch recorded the contents on a notebook. The magic stone remained the same temperature during this period.

When the inquiry was over, Wendy looked at No. 76.

"Are you... not a witch?"

"She's our friend," Amy said. "If it were not for her to stall the knights of the Kingdom of Dawn, we would've all been taken back to the dungeon."

"I used to be a guide, or a waitress, in an underground exhibition in the City of Glow. And Mr. Ambassador bought me from the Chamber of Commerce." No. 76 slowly uttered the words she had prepared. She had a vague awareness of their means of examination now. Those questions were not casually raised, but had clear purposes and could not be replied with vague answers.

Some of them might be able to detect the lies.

No. 76 was not worried about it. She could accurately control every movement of her body and also temporarily cut off her control of any part of her body. The usual subtle changes when people lied did not exist for her. Her words would be impeccable unless they could directly invade her mind,

Her guess was proved.

After her answers, Wendy did not show any strangeness, "I see. Thank you for saving them, and if you have no other place to go, you may live with them in the Foreign Affairs Building."

"Thank you for your consideration," she said gratefully.

"Wait..." Just then, another green-haired witch who had been silent before suddenly asked, "Can you tell me where you got the ring on your chest?"

# Chapter 691: The Path into the City

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Her words surprised No. 76 a little.

It seemed that they were examined checked by more than one person.

However, 400 years of training had taught her how to hide emotions, not to mention that her body could be separated from her consciousness as she wished. A sudden interrogation was not enough to make her panic.

No. 76 pretended to be astonished and then reluctantly took a ring out of her robe. She hesitated for a long time before saying, "It was... stolen from Black Money."

At the same time, she gave a higher rating of the Witch Union in her heart. Originally, she had thought that they were too casual in welcoming newcomers, but it did not seem to be the case. They had sent a witch to detect the lies and another one with the ability of Clairvoyance. They could not be more cautious.

"Black Money?" The witch with green and long hair picked up the ring in her hand and looked it over for a moment. "This ... seems to be a Magic Stone, but it's a little different."

No. 76 frowned at her words in her heart. "They actually know the existence of Magic Stone? Then it's troublesome now. Although it's activated in a different way from the ordinary Magic Stone, they'll figure it out sooner or later. I have to distract them

from it. After all, I don't have a second stone."

"Black money is the underground exhibition where I've ever worked... There were often auctions of things from ancient ruins. The boss often said that those things had unbelievable power and the more exotic, the more popular. In addition, they occasionally had auction... auction..."

"What?" Wendy asked.

"Auction of witches," whispered No. 76.

Hearing these words, the four witches showed unmasked anger on their faces, and their concern over the ring became a bit less. Obviously selling witches as slaves was abhorrent to them, which also illustrated indirectly that the Witch Union in Graycastle would never agree with the idea of the Starfall City.

"No. 76 didn't lie. I was almost sold to the nobles by the Black Money," Amy echoed. "Fortunately, Mr. Ambassador saved me."

"They're bound to be punished sooner or later," said the blonde witch coldly.

"That ring..." No. 76 pretended to be timid.

"Although Miss Agatha will be very interested in this thing, let's wait until you are familiar with Neverwinter," the green-haired Witch said, shrugging. She did not keep the ring; instead, she put it

back on her hand.

No. 76 was slightly surprised for a moment. "Agatha? The name sounds quite familiar. It seems that I have heard of it somewhere."

"I promise you'll no longer encounter such a thing," Wendy comforted them. "No one will dare to attack you in Neverwinter. His Majesty, King Roland, believes that the era where witches and mortals live together will soon come. By that time, not only in the Western Region of Graycastle but also in the whole kingdom, no one will regard us as the Devil's minions."

"Will there be such a day?" said Broken Sword rather in disbelief.

"Of course, that is why we built the Witch Union," Wendy laughed. "Anyway, let me take you to rest."

...

No. 76 was slowly moved onto a stretcher and carried out of the cabin by the sailors. The moment she left the sailing ship, she finally saw the whole picture of the pier. Heavy snow flying in the air did not stop people working busily at the pier. Dozens of people lined up along the pier sweeping the snow on the ground. Farther out were the weird freighters unloading goods. Just as Amy said, without towering masts and sails, yet they were able to navigate in the river.

"Those boats seem to have no puddles..."

"And are they made of stones?"

The witches lowered their voices and discussed with each other. She clearly saw on Wendy's face a proud smile, which still gave off warmth even in the heavy snow.

However, No. 76 was surprised by much more things.

As they entered the city, the sight of Neverwinter slowly appeared in front of her.

This new king's city bore little resemblance to the cities of common people she had ever seen or the Holy City of the Union. Its broad, solid streets stood straight like black vertical lines. The falling snowflakes had no effect on road access, as the snow was orderly piled on both sides of the road, which looked like small white hills.

The trees were neatly planted to beautify the scene, and their bald trunks were decorated with colorful ribbons. It was conceivable that there should be green trees in midsummer season, branches crisscrossing one another overhead to form a natural awning.

Blocks of square-framed brick houses stood side by side with almost the same size. Except that, No. 76 did not see any bungalows or shabby thatched cottages.



It was already the Months of Demons, yet many people still walked in the heavy snow. Quite a few of them that were passing by would stop and greet the dark-haired witch with a nodding. Their expressions were sincere and enthusiastic, so they were obviously not compelled to do so.

This was what she cared most about.

For the first time, she was witnessing witches and common people getting along harmoniously with each other. Although she heard of a non-interference period between the witches and common people during the first Battle of Divine Will, it was, after all, 800 or 900 years ago. And in this city, it seemed that they had taken a step further, as they were not separated but instead were living harmoniously together.

"His Majesty, King Roland, believes that the era when witches and mortals live together will soon come." She suddenly recalled Wendy's words.

It was not a joke. In Neverwinter, they were on the threshold of it.

During a-month-long voyage, she had had some knowledge of Prince Roland of Graycastle. He became a much-anticipated king from an obscure lord of Border Town. Besides the low-level battles with common people, he also defeated the church with numerous soldiers of the God's Punishment Army, which might prove his strength. Was it related to the view in front of her?

If it were not for pretending to be wounded, No. 76 would almost sit up to have a close look at the city.

According to Pasha, they were bound to deal with the common people sooner or later. To defeat the demons, they had to temporarily conceal the past of the Union. After all, the strong enemy was approaching while they could not easily leave the maze ruins, therefore it would be not easy to solve the tricky problems left by the Starfall City. As long as the witches could survive, they would be able to reproduce the glory of Taquila one day. At this point, both Lady Alice and Lady Natalyae hold the same view.

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After arriving at the Foreign Affairs building, No. 76 and Hero were lifted back to bed and the other three witches, sitting by the fire, excitedly talked about what they saw and heard along the way. There was no doubt that in a short time, Neverwinter had left a deep impression on them.

Before long, Wendy walked into the room with a little girl.

"This is Nana. She's able to heal wounds, no matter new or old."

"Even broken legs?" Amy could not wait to go to the bed and opened the blanket which covered Hero.

The little girl reached out her hands for a try and slowly shook her head, "No. Unless you still have her broken legs. If the whole

legs were lost, I can only join them with other legs, but I can't make her legs grow again."

"You mean, we have to find two new legs for her?"

"Well, it's best to be newly cut," Nana replied earnestly. Childish as her voice was, it made all the witches invariably shudder.

# Chapter 692: A New Hope

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"Nana!" Wendy said giving her a reproving look.

"I'm not kidding. Besides joining the amputated limbs, His Majesty also told me to do a lot of experiments, like exchanging the wings of roosters and grey eagles to see if the rooster could fly. And exchanging the limbs of frogs and mice, the bodies of cows and lambs..." the little girl said, counting on her fingers.

The four witches all gasped out upon these words.

No. 76 was full of interest in her words, however. "Fully studying the mysteries of an ability, rather than fearing and avoiding it. This was apparently the style of the Quest Society members. No wonder this king is willing to accept the witches. Judging from this point, at least he isn't stubborn and conservative." "What happened then?" She could not help asking.

"Most of the experiments failed at first, but since His Majesty told Lily to join the trial, the success rate has been raised a lot. It's a pity that the limbs basically lost their functions after I joined them, so I have to exchange them back again, " Nana paused for a moment and continued to say, "ah... I forgot to mention, these are Heterogeneous connections. If I exchange the limbs of the same species, there will be nearly no difference after treatment. So if you have two legs... em..."

"Ahem, please don't mind her," Wendy covered the little girl's mouth and said, "About the legs, we'll find a solution. It may take

some time, but Hero will stand up one day. You can rest assured."

Everyone looked at each other, not knowing how to respond for a moment.

"Anyway, let's treat your friend's wound first," Wendy patted Nana's head embarrassed and said, "hurry up."

No. 76 pretended to be expectant and scared, looking at the girl coming to her and pressing her hands on her broken legs.

The ring on her chest became hot again.

She suddenly realized that she had a troublesome problem.

"What expression should I wear when I'm treated?"

No. 76 did not know how it felt when the crushed bones and joints were being healed by magic power. "Is it painful or soothing? Or should I feel nothing? Should I cry out aloud or bite my teeth to moan?"

She was still thinking of how to respond, when the little girl had already withdrawn her hands and said, "Your legs are fine now. Next, I'll heal your arms."

She tried to lift the broken legs and found that she was able to move them now.

In a moment, the twisted elbows also returned to normal state.

"Your mental condition is really good, " said Nana with a curious look at her. "Most people will fall asleep once they have been healed, and you're the first one even without a yawn."

The heart of No. 76 suddenly sank. She pretended to be terrified and replied, "I, I just..."

"However, sleeping is only a natural reaction of the body, and immediate waking up won't have any damage. Don't worry." The little girl interrupted, "If you haven't moved for a long time, you'll feel awkward in the first days. You'll soon get used to it."

"Is that... Is that true? Thank... thank you."

Fortunately, the blonde witch who had checked their identity was not present. No. 76 secretly glanced at Wendy and found that she was talking with Hero rather than paying attention to her. She was slightly relieved.

"Are you really healed?" Amy asked with concern.

No. 76 lifted her originally broken right hand and waved to her, "Ah, it has been cured. Miss Nana has a really incredible ability..."

Seeing that, the worries in the eyes of other witches gradually

faded away. Amy bit her teeth and made up her mind. She walked to Wendy pulled her sleeve and said, "Please use my legs to cure Hero."

"What?" Wendy was obviously shocked.

"My ability is self-recovery, so my legs may grow back if I cut them."

"No, Amy, don't..." Hero hurriedly said. "You've only suffered minor injuries. What if they can't grow?"

"I'm willing to give it a try," She insisted.

"Annie, stop her!"

"Amy, don't say that. Even if you make Hero stand up, she'll feel sad for a long time."

"But..."

"Well, stop arguing," Nana suddenly said. "There may be another way to cure her legs."

Everyone looked straight to her.

"I'm 16 years old now. In two years, I'll enter my adulthood and

then my ability will be greatly enhanced. Maybe at that time, I'll be able to directly make the broken limbs regenerate," She pursed her lips and said, "another possibility is ability evolution. If I also possess an ability evolution like Sister Anna and Sister Leaf did, maybe I can even make you have two more legs."

"Ability evolution? What's it?" Amy asked, staring in shock.

"That means the magic power in your body will cohere and transform into a whole new look. Haven't you ever seen it?" said Nana proudly. "Anyway, it's very amazing. As long as you study hard, you also have the opportunity to evolve new abilities."

Listening to the excited narration of the little girl, No. 76 felt her heart became tumultuous.

If she was not mistaken, the evolution that Nana mentioned was the High Awakening.

But she also felt like listening to a fairy tale... "Are there actually several Senior Witches in the Witch Union, who appeared only in the last two years?"

"How could this be possible?"

Senior Witches were not like the wheat in the field, which you could harvest as long as you planted the seeds. Every promoted Awakened was a precious treasure of the Union, and it required talent, diligence and luck to be promoted. Even before she was



transformed to be a God's Punishment Warrior, she was just an ordinary combat witch.

"Why did Nana think most witches will certainly evolve?"

"'As long as you study hard, you also have the opportunity to evolve new abilities.' What a nonsense! If you are more experienced and knowledgeable, you can indeed enhance your possibility of enlightenment, but just a tiny bit. If it were really so easy, the Union would not have experienced the problem where no witch had been promoted in nearly a hundred years and thus becoming short handed in the late period of the Battle of Divine Will."

"But... in front of a group of wild witches who have never heard of High Awakening, is it necessary for Nana to lie?"

If it was not for pretending to be a "common person", she would have asked the little girl more questions to find out the truth.

"What could be sure is there are indeed some Senior Witches in the Witch Union; otherwise, Nana could not clearly explain the High Awakening. But the number of Senior Witches should be exaggerated by her. Or maybe the high ranks of the union are very powerful and have little contact with the new witches. So this little girl who has just awakened mistook them as promoted persons."

With this in mind, No. 76 felt so heartened.

Maybe she really had the opportunity to find the Chosen One in Neverwinter?

# Chapter 693: The Ideal Place

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Dinner was served by a servant.

Before the servant opened the covers, Annie had already smelled the mouthwatering aroma. In the iron box, there was a pile of thick bread which was baked golden. Just one glimpse, and she knew that the bread was made up of fine wheat flour that had been kneaded and fermented after being peeled. Besides, there was also a small packet of butter and a pot of meat broth, which was enough for five people to enjoy.

"The spoons and plates are all in the wooden cupboard. Tomorrow morning, breakfast will also be served, so you don't need to keep leftovers," the servant said, "Before getting a Resident Identity Card (ID), you can't leave the Foreign Affairs Building at your will. Additionally, you aren't allowed to go to the basement. If you want to practice your abilities, the rooftop is available. There's a service room on the first floor, where I sleep. If you need anything, you're free to come to me. Unlike hotels, all services here are free."

The five people were all in a daze and did not even regain their senses after the servant bowed and left.

"Is this the hospitality of the great nobles? It's exactly the same as the play," Amy was the first to sigh and said, "except for some of the lines that needed to be changed."

"Such as?" Broken Sword and Hero asked curiously.

"Like Your Honorable Excellency, it's my pleasure to serve you... that's how it usually starts."

"We aren't the noble, so of course he didn't talk to us like that." No.76 smiled gently. "Anyway, let's eat first. I'm starving."

"You made a good point." They all swallowed their saliva in agreement.

This was not good. Was the ruler of the Kingdom of Graycastle using delicious food to seduce them? Amy began to feel concerned. It looked like the king was trying to rope them in, but the leader of the Witch Union did not even ask them about their abilities. Their behaviors were so inconsistent that she could not figure out their real intention. Since she was not alone and there were four other people, she had to be more cautious and not commit mistakes that she had made before.

Undoubtedly, the safest way was to stay away from the Western Region. The church had been defeated, so their greatest enemy was gone. What they needed most was to find a village or a small town closer to bigger cities so that they could live there with hidden identities, just like what they had done in the Kingdom of Dawn.

However, this method would not work now.

She could not help but sigh when she saw No.76 stumbling beside the table. Anyway, Witch Union was capable of healing the wounded and the prospect they had described was inviting. Now that there was a ray of hope that Hero could stand up again, she could not simply take them away.

Well, I'd better eat.

When Annie put a piece of bread with butter into her mouth, her mouth was instantly filled with a glutinous soft sweetness which she had never tasted before. The bread was very delicate without any gravel and it melted in her mouth the minute she bit into it. She did not even need to chew and the bread flowed easily into her throat.

Damn it! They could easily be seduced by the delicious food.

Although she was thinking like this, she could not stop her hand from grabbing another piece of bread.

Almost each one in the room was busy eating the bread and no one was talking.

They let out a deep breath when only crumbs were left in the iron box.

"Will we still be able to eat such food in the future?" Broken Sword licked all her fingers reluctantly.

"I'm afraid... that's unlikely." Amy held the pot and poured the aromatic broth, dividing it equally into five bowls. There were some scallion and oil circles on the surface, which made it more delicious. "Only the upper nobles can afford to eat such bread and even my father only used to eat coarse bread."

"It's good enough to eat coarse bread. I remember that we always stayed hungry when we first arrived in the Kingdom of Dawn." Hero blew the hot steam and eagerly took a big sip, and then she exhaled the heat. When she murmured, there was a long-awaited satisfaction in her tone.

"Lady Wendy has said that we can enjoy many benefits after we join Witch Union... do these benefits include delicious food?"

"She had also said that she would show us around Neverwinter and Witch Union before she left. We can ask her then."

"I hope that the food would be included in these benefits."

Witnessing that the other four witches were discussing the treatment which might be given by Witch Union, Annie had a faint prediction that they would stay in the city for a very long time.

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After a shower, they went to bed early—the apartment consisted of one living room and four bedrooms. After a short discussion, they decided how to allocate the four bedrooms. As the strongest

witch among them, Annie would certainly choose to sleep together with Hero who could not stand up.

The bed was very soft and there was no mildew at all. It was obvious cleaning was often done here. There were only a few small flames in the fireplace and the shaking and dim light reflected the furniture on the white stone walls. The dark shadows were slightly shaking as if they were dancing to the chilling wind outside the window.

She put Hero under the bedding and blew out the candles.

Annie cast her ability to make the bed warm through her heated hands. Hero clung to her bosom and gently asked, "It's been almost a year since we left the Kingdom of Wolfheart?"

"Yeah... it's been one year and two months if we count the days since we set foot on the border of the Kingdom of Dawn." Annie nodded.

"How long has it been since we left our hometown?"

This question made her silent. In fact, Annie had forgotten the exact date when she left her hometown and she only remembered that it was a remote village to the northwest of the Kingdom of Wolfheart. Since her identity as a witch was exposed, she had to continuously escape toward the east and traveled almost half of the entire Kingdom of Wolfheart. She only settled down in the suburbs of the king's city after Bloodfang Association betrayed her.

It was the same for Broken Sword and Hero.

They were forced to leave their homes and escape due to different reasons. They suffered a lot on the road and only when they met Annie in Wolfheart, did they all escape together as a group.

"It has been almost five years since I left my hometown," Hero said in a lowered tone, "In the five years, I've never settled down in order to avoid being captured by the church. I thought that I needn't run away anymore in the king's city but to my surprise, I still have to escape, even if I've lost my legs."

Annie could not help hugging her even more tightly.

"Lady Wendy has said that this is the home of the witches. Can we really settle down here?" Hero's voice was on and off, like the faint sound of winds outside the windows. It sounded like she was asking Annie, and yet it also sounded like she was murmuring. "I don't want to escape any longer."

Annie's eyes started to well up. "Don't worry. We'll have a house of our own and you'll regain the use of your legs. You can go anywhere you want to for leisure instead of running away."

"Really?" Hero paused for a long time and asked, "If only I were born in the Kingdom of Graycastle." In the end, Annie could not even hear her voice.



When Annie opened her mouth and was about to say something, she heard even breathing sounds.

The girl in her bosom had fallen asleep.

# Chapter 694: "Beams of Light"

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After Roland fell asleep, Nightingale entered the Mist and quietly left the castle.

Her destination was the Foreign Affairs Building.

Even at night when the land was cloaked in darkness, in the misty world, she could still see everything clearly in black and white. Taking advantage of distorted outlines, she could jump several meters in one leap. With merely a few steps, she passed through the courtyard wall around the building.

Roland had called this way of moving 'Flash'. He described it as a masterstroke to move with super speed, which required no buffering time. She liked the name 'Flash' the first time she heard it. Just as it implied, such a movement was as quick as a flash of lightning and as quiet as a shadow. She could come out and disappear anywhere in a sudden, making it hard for anyone to predict her movements.

She liked such a description but did not quite understand what the buffering time meant.

But she did not mind it, as she had already got used to this old talking habit of his. It was not a rare thing for her to hear some strange words from him.

After getting out of the Castle District, Nightingale did not follow the ramp that she often took to descend the hill, but directly leaped

high above the hillside and walked in the air. She followed the lines that appeared in the air, and after several strides, she landed straight on the top floor of the Foreign Affairs Building.

The building was located in the area between the Castle District and uptown, a four-story structure as high as the upland where the castle stood. It was the second concrete building after the Witch House.

Initially, it had been built to detain some important prisoners, such as the family of Duke Ryan, who had been kept in the dungeon. As far as Nightingale could see, Roland treated them with much more respect than what they deserved. Although they were given the titles of prisoners, this new place was much better than the previous dungeon, and they were also offered the chance to walk outside to relieve themselves.

Maybe His Majesty thought he would not have many enemies to detain here, so he used the rooms overground as the first place to temporarily accommodate the new-come honored guests, such as the alchemists of the Alchemist Association of the King's City, the sages of the Astrology Association, as well as sea traders from the Fjords, who had lived here for some time.

Since most of the rooms in the Foreign Affairs Building were unoccupied and the location was quite far from the central heating system, it was merely supplied with tap water. As the residents in the building had different backgrounds, His Majesty had deployed some of his guards here in order to show his respect for the guests, as well as keep an eye on them.

Nightingale, of course, would not take the corridor in case of alarming the guards. She passed directly through the walls of the top floor, heading for the bedrooms where the witches from Wolfheart lived.

She did not find anything strange about the witches in the afternoon examination. The Magic Cyclones they showed were very stable, and their capacities were quite ordinary, which meant that they belonged to the most common type of witches. In the inquiry, she knew that they basically told no lie except for some vague, subtle answers they offered about their past. With her derivative skill, she captured those details, but she thought that this kind of concealment was reasonable. These witches were tortured, hunted, and even treated in ways they were simply unable to speak of. All they had suffered had become shadows in their hearts, which they were unwilling to talk about.

If they were the only ones coming to Neverwinter, she probably would accept them as new sisters at once.

But they came with the ordinary woman called No. 76, and she was the one arousing Nightingale's suspicion.

She had no magic glow or different demeanor, but Nightingale could still sense something strange about her. When she recalled afterward, she realized that it was the woman's attitude in answering all her questions that bothered her. She had hidden nothing from her, which was really weird.

Nightingale had seen that many people tell everything they knew when they were dying. Yet, this woman who had once served as a

maid for the underground Chamber of Commerce, told the truth about herself to a stranger she met for the first time. This was indeed a rare attitude.

But Nightingale could not judge whether the woman was using a fake identity or not based on what she knew now.

After all, No. 76 did not lie.

That meant that by now, what she said about her past and background was authentic. In addition, the testimonies of Yorko, Amy, and Annie could corroborate that. She indeed was a guide who had served the exhibition 'Black Money' and been bought by Yorko because of getting involved in the witch auction.

That's why Nightingale decided to visit No. 76 at night and watch her behavior in the Mist.

If No. 76 harbored any malicious intentions, this would be the easiest moment for her to show some flaws.

She went through the bedrooms one by one, and soon she found the room where her target was.

Most of the witches had fallen asleep, but No. 76's room was still lit up. She was sitting on the bed, playing with a ring in her hand by the candlelight, eyes full of joy and intoxication.

"Is it because of the fair gemstone on the ring?" Nightingale

wondered.

She walked close to the bed, quietly watching No. 76.

But she saw nothing suspicious about her behavior, all she did was play with the ring, like a lucky woman who was too excited about harboring a treasure to sleep.

The ring was glittering with a faint magic glow, but it was not a rare thing for a guide in the exhibition, which often auctioned relics of unknown origin, to have such a Magic Stone.

One hour later, she was tired and sleepy, drowsily dropping her arms and closing her eyes. At this moment, Nightingale gently sighed.

She thought, "It seems that I'm over-scrupulous."

After giving No. 76 one last glance, Nightingale reached out her hand to extinguish the candle and turned to pass through the wall, entering the howling snowstorm.

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The heat of colorful Magic Stone subsided, showing that the one who used magic power had left the bedroom.

No. 76 slightly let out a sigh of relief.

Even if they had gained infinite life by the way of Soul Transfer, it did not mean that they could stay awake overnight. When she disconnected her soul from her body, she could rest far more efficiently than taking an ordinary sleep. In this way, it would only take her two or four hours to rest every day to fully recover herself.

Given that, she went to bed much later than the witches.

But she had never expected something incredible to happen because of this habit.

No. 76 opened her eyes, looking at the empty bedside where the visitor had stood. Through the magic stone on the ring, she had seen a bright beam of orange light there just now. It had been as thick as an adult's trunk, directly rising up to the ceiling. No. 76 had been surprised to find that this 'Key' had surpassed the remaining Senior Witch of Taquila, Pasha, and was on par with that of the Three Chiefs of the Union. Although she had not been able to see the visitor, she knew that her ability must be very complicated, rather than a simple invisibility skill.

She wondered if the visitor was Anna or Leaf mentioned by Nana.

Judging from the light, she knew that there was still a certain gap between the visitor and the Chosen One, but that strong beam of orange light was enough to thrill her.

It was very simple to activate the colorful magic stone ring. As long as someone nearby was performing some magic, the Magic Stone on the ring would absorb a small part of the surging magic power and indicate the complexity of the magic skill through the beam of light she could observe through Magic Stone. The thicker and stronger the beam was, the more complicated the 'Key' was.

No. 76 became increasingly excited as she thought of it. She simply walked out of the room and went to the top of the building.

The snowstorm was blowing against her face, but she was not able to feel cold at all. This lack of feelings usually made her sick, but now as her heart was filled with excitement, she felt vigorous standing in the wind and chasing the last glimmer of light.

She raised the ring and pointed it at the castle, according to Wendy, that's where the witches lived. Now that the first Senior Witch had appeared, would the Witch Union give her more surprises?

She was looking forward to it.

However, something abnormal happened in a sudden.

The ring in her hand started to shake, as if it was resonating with something.

Through the Magic Stone, she saw a beam of light she had never seen before. It was almost like a wide high wall, filling half of the



sky.

# Chapter 695: The Encounter

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"How, How could this be possible?"

No. 76 felt as though a bomb was exploding in her heart, and stood petrified on the spot.

Since she knew that the colorful Magic Stone was only able to respond to the fluctuation of magic power within a limited range, which, in theory, was around 100 steps, she had just casually raised the ring and not expected to see anything in the castle at this distance. She wondered how this happened?

She took a deep breath, then blinked, and again put the ring before her eye.

The beam was still there, what she saw was not an illusion but a solid sight.

A surge of indescribable excitement rose in her mind, making it impossible for her to stay calm now. She got in touch with her people through thoughts.

"Pasha, what kind of people are eligible to be called the Chosen One?"

"Have you seen the edge of the ring? The one whose beam of light can fill the entire field of vision will be the Chosen One we're looking for."

"This is too dramatic. Even Lady Eleanor's beam of light is only capable of covering half of the ring's view."

"Hence that person must have more potential than the Three Chiefs of the Union combined. I admit that the requirement is hard to meet, but we have no choice other than this. Remember, the Key neither represents the strength of the magic power nor equates to fighting capacity. That's why you have to make sure to check every witch."

"The edge? Fill the vfield ision?" Number 76 repeated it in her heart.

"No... Pasha, the miracle I'm seeing now is far more than that." Even seeing through the ring which had been put closest to her eye, No. 76 could not see the entire beam. The width of the beam extended beyond her sight so that only by moving the ring horizontally she was able to see the vast panorama of the huge light wall.

"Deities finally smile at human beings."

"Lady Natalia, you're right."

"I've found the Chosen One here."

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When Roland entered the bathroom, yawning, he saw that Zero was washing up before the sink.

"Mm... Where's the toothpaste?"

"Here." The little girl slightly stood aside and handed him a tube of toothpaste that had almost run out.

"Thanks." Roland took a glass of water and stuffed the wet toothbrush into his mouth. Looking at himself and Zero, a tall person and a short person, in the mirror, crowding before the narrow sink and making synchronous elbow movements to brush their teeth, he suddenly felt that this scene was hilarious.

Zero spat out the foam in her mouth and shot Roland a glance. "What're you sneering at?"

"You're such a shorty." Roland returned with his nasal voice.

Then he felt a kick in his calf.

"Remember to shave, or you'll look old," she said as she swept back her white hair and began to tie a ponytail, "Don't shame me today."

"It was only a parents' meeting." He sighed and rinsed his toothbrush clean. "I'm not your true family. There's no need for an agent to be so formal."

Given that his wardrobe was filled with cheap clothes, he would be thankful to find something that would make him look virtuous, not to mention a formal suit.

"By the way, I think you look better with hair hanging down," Roland smacked and said, "but if you insist, I suggest the twin tail that'll suit you more."

"None of your business!" Zero retorted.

Then he was pushed out of the bathroom.

"It seems that her temper has worsened after summer... Do I indulge her too much?" Roland pondered.

As the times he came in and went out of the Dream World increased, Roland had mastered the trick of how to enter the Dream World. In other words, it depended on him. If he had not intended to enter it, the strange Dream World would not appear, and he just slept through the night without any other dreams.

Thus, he could easily control the passing of time in the Dream World.

Over two months, apart from further explorations of the Holy City of Hermes, Roland had spent the rest of his time in various libraries searching for some half-remembered books he had read long ago.

In addition, he found that the peculiar power flowing in his body also worked in the memory fragment. For that reason, his venture to the snowfield turned out to be much smoother than he had imagined. With the purchased climbing ropes and drilling machine, he could reach deep into the cave under the cathedral, where the Pivotal Secret Temple was located and do an investigation. Although Roland did not find the Prayer Room that Isabella had mentioned, materials recording the secret history and the research on Magic Stone were really mind-blowing to him.

But he failed to enter the old Holy City by passing through the secret passage in the Pivotal Secret Area because when he was halfway in the passage, he saw that the road ahead just disappeared, leaving nothing but endless darkness and scarlet lightning, as if the void had consumed the other end.

It seemed that when Zero was defeated, her will to resist was still very strong and that only a small area, New Holy City, was saved in the memory fragment.

Roland's deposit was accumulated rapidly by selling the armor that he had moved out from the Holy City. Finally, he bought an air conditioner and installed it in the living room, as well as a bigger refrigerator to replace the old and small one, significantly improving his living conditions in the department.

Of course, there were still some troubles. He had not expected that some people had taken some photos of him when he had been running incredibly fast on the street to save Zero. Those photos were not only posted on the internet but also reported by the local

news channel. But fortunately, since no one clearly captured his look and he also discarded his clothes right after the accident, Zero did not suspect him.

As a result, the topic of who this martialist-like man was and why he would wear such a casual suit of vest and shorts had gone viral on the internet for some time.

And about this, Roland had to say... "Ahem, my apology for being too poor to buy some decent clothes."

Now that he did not have to worry about his livelihood, he naturally turned his attention to his neighbors in this building.

He wondered if there were similar doors that opened into the memory fragments hidden in these people's rooms.

Apart from cheating, the simplest way to knock open their doors was to pay them.

"I'm ready, uncle. Let's go," Zero said as she finished dressing and walked to him with a bag on her back.

Today was September 12th, the first day of the new term, the attendance of every student's parent was mandatory.

Roland was impressed by Zero's new look.

She had put on a black short-sleeved shirt paired with a short pleated skirt and a pair of white stockings and sneakers, which made her look quite youthful and lovely.

She had tied her soft white hair in a twin tail that hung on her shoulders along with yellow hair ribbons, her lineament impeccable, her skin fair and translucent, her pupils light red, as if she was an elf walking out from the pictures.

Roland could not help reaching out his hand to rub her head and said, "That's right."

"I just happened to want to tie my hair like this, it's not because of what you said..."

"Yeah, I know."

"It's true!"

"I didn't say it's not true."

"Why do I think you're lying to me?"

"That's because you think too much," he said, pretending to be serious while holding back the laugh in his heart. "Let's go, or we'll miss the early bus."

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All Roland needed to do in the parents' meeting was sitting in the back of the classroom and listening to the children reporting their goals and guarantees in the new term. Students at this age were not accustomed to lying and would work harder to meet the goals they had promised in front of their parents.

Roland had thought that it would be a peaceful morning, but he did not expect that the Dream World would be so unpredictable.

"Why is it you again?"

A crisp female voice rang in his ears.

He turned his head and found that it was Garcia who was sitting beside him.

# Chapter 696: Victory of the Wise

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Garcia wore a low-key outfit. She had on a plaid shirt and a pair of jeans paired with a pair of sunglasses and a cap on her head, probably not to draw unwanted attention. But Roland's impression of his sister was very deep, so he could immediately tell from her voice who she was, even if her face was veiled tightly.

Roland glanced at the note on the arm of the chair to make sure that he did not take the wrong seat before he asked, "Why can't it be me?"

"Well," she let out a nasal sound to show her dissatisfaction, apparently having seen the name on the note too.

"Anyway, I can't believe you have kids!"

This was totally mind-blowing. Did Zero take possession of both Garcia and her child who she gave birth to at the Port of Clearwater in the battle of Everwinter?

"My cousin," she spat out coldly.

"Well... It only seems to be a substitute." Roland thought.

Somehow he felt a bit strange about the change in Garcia's attitude towards him, from the contempt and disgust when they first met, to the current impatience which was open and obvious.

As attendees trickled in, the parents' meeting finally began. After the teacher on stage finished talking about his plan for the new term, it came to the part where every student had the right of speech. As soon as Zero rose from her chair, her pure natural white hair and crystal red pupils that looked remarkably unique, coupled with her beautiful appearance, triggered a sudden surge of argument among the parents and drew fixed gazes from all of the children. Her beauty was something that every witch maintained in the Dream World, something that could be count as a huge advantage in Roland's opinion.

Roland had no choice but to enjoy the "eye salute" from other attendees since he had to stand up to accompany Zero who was about to make a speech. He could sense the doubts and jeers in the other parents' eyes, thinking that Zero certainly belonged to another family and he was unqualified to be a parent. He could sense all that from their eyes and smiles. Roland had to admit that his casual outfit, a cartoon short-sleeved shirt paired with a pair of knee-length pants, made him look extremely different compared with the rest of them.

After Roland returned to his seat, he sensed Garcia's secret gaze, which depressed him even more. With a pair of sunglasses, she could gaze at him as freely as she wanted to, but if he stared back to her and found out that she was not actually paying any attention to him, that would be quite awkward.

It was not long before he felt his elbow being nudged by Garcia and a note was passed to him.

Roland frowned and unfolded the note. Her handwriting

displayed such a sharpness and sternness that even someone who could not appreciate calligraphy could feel the power behind it. As Roland read the note, his heart thudded slightly.

"You're the mysterious martialist who pelted in the street the other day, right?"

"Hell, how did she know that?" Roland cursed in his heart.

Roland could not help but turn to look at Garcia, unexpectedly finding that she was still writing something.

Soon came the second note.

"Don't deny it. Martialists have a very acute sense of judging body figures and a sharp memory to capture the details of the movements. When I first saw you in the news, your figure gave me a familiar feeling, but now I'm sure it's you. Tell me honestly, did you just awaken your Force of Nature not long ago or did you mean to hide who you really were from the beginning?"

Remembering his figure? How dramatic! Even if a video was placed in front of him, he was not sure he would be able to recognize himself. Anyway, Garcia could not go so far as to ask every man in her eyes that had a similar figure. That meant that she must be, in a sense, extremely observant in order to connect the mysterious martialist with him.

"Is this why she changed her attitude?"

Roland hesitated for a moment, and then as soon as he raised his hand, a pen was given to him.

He had intended to deny it, to argue about how absurd it was, but an idea suddenly hit him as his pen touched the paper.

To be honest, his interest in the martialist was as much as that of any onlooker. He did not even have the slightest intention of picking up the gauntlet. In the Dream World, he could be regarded as half of a creator God, so winning a fight was no big deal, yet losing would be undoubtedly humiliating. Moreover, in nine cases out of ten, according to what he saw on TV, he would most likely lose without any formal training.

Actually, compared to collecting materials and exploring the memory fragments, the studying of the Force of Nature was not a top priority, yet he found out that he might as well take this encounter as a nice breakthrough. It would obviously be good if he could take this opportunity to improve the relationship between him and Garcia. He could use it to get the chance to visit her in her apartment.

Following his mind, Roland wrote down the answer on the back of the note, his handwriting crooked.

"What is Force of Nature? I don't quite understand what you mean."

"Even kids know that. Why are you acting like a fool?"

After tossing back the note, she also took off her sunglasses and cast a stern glance at Roland out of the corners of her eyes.

"So the Force of Nature is the reason why my strength grew suddenly?"

"The Force of Nature can do more than that. Haven't you paid any attention to the propaganda of the Martialist Association?"

"I am neither interested in fighting nor concerned with what you said."

"Besides participating in the competitions, being a martialist also comes with the responsibility to preserve urban order and ensure social security."

"What is that?"

"It's complicated. We'd better find a place to discuss more details."

Excellent, Roland applauded himself for his own intelligence in his heart. Things seemed to be moving in the exact direction he had hoped.

"Really? But I have to go to the company this afternoon. What about visiting you in the evening?"

Roland got everything under his control. He thought if he promised Garcia now, they would probably find a cafe or a small restaurant nearby to have a talk, but if he made up some excuses to delay the talk until evening, she would find it hard to refuse his visit her home. After all, room 0825 and 0827 were so close that made it much more reasonable to have the talk in her home at a time that was between dinner and midnight.

As Roland expected, Garcia hesitated for a while and then nodded.

The students and parents took turns to speak on the stage. When it was Garcia's cousin's turn to stand up and make a speech, the murmuring of the audience burst out again.

But this time they focused on his social class and background rather than his school performance and his appearance.

"Is he the little lord of the Clover Association?"

"He didn't come with his parents."

"How could famous entrepreneurs like them have time to attend this meeting?"

"Does this lady also belong to the Clover Association?"

"It should be. Apparently, she specially dressed up to avoid unwanted attention."

"It would be nice if I could accost her."

"Stop daydreaming. How would a lady like her ever talk to you?"

"The Clover Association? What the hell is that?" Roland rolled his eyes. "Sounds like an extraordinarily big company, but in that case, how could a relative of the owner of the Association live in the shabby tube-shaped apartment?"

Moreover, Roland noticed a little strange expression on Garcia's face. Although her eyes were hidden under the sunglasses, her clenched fists and sinking mouth gave up her emotions.

Roland had a feeling that there was more to it, but he did not think more about it. Tonight, he would have the chance to check whether his assumption was correct.



# Chapter 697: A Nighttime Meeting with Garcia

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After dinner, Roland went to the room 0827 just as he promised when Zero was doing her homework in her bedroom.

He knocked on the door several times and it creaked opened.

Garcia still wore a stony-face, saying, "Come on in."

After entering the room, Roland found that the decoration of her apartment was way better than his. The floorboard was changed into solid wood. Beside the door, there was a special shoe shelf. Looking up, a crystal chandelier was hung from the ceiling. Even the walls were repainted with fine white-color paint, and it was obviously not the original cheap paint which was used to brush the walls of this tube-shaped apartment building in the earlier time.

"I've no extra slippers. You can wear mine first." She pointed to a pair of slippers decorated with furry rabbit ears in the bottom layer of the shoe shelf. "I love wearing large-size slippers and I think they won't be too small for you."

Roland put his feet into the slippers. They were not small but they were for winter. The minute he wore them, he felt hot. He could not stand the two furry rabbit ears and could hardly imagine what Garcia would look like when she wore these cute slippers.

She's nonchalant about everything. How can such a pair of slippers match her apathy?

He walked to the sofa and sat on it. "By the way, do you have water? Dinner is a little salty."

Garcia frowned and looked at him. "I only have ice water."

"Ice water is also okay."

When she turned around to fetch water from the kitchen, Roland held his head up and looked into the room. All the apartments in this building had almost the same layout and every two adjacent apartments were symmetrical. Based on the layout of his own apartment Room 0825, he was sure that this passage facing the door must lead to the lumber-room of Room 0827.

As he expected, he saw a similar compartment at the end of the passage, but Garcia had apparently redecorated it. She had even changed the door into a louver sliding door. It usually could not be locked, which was good news for him, but he was still worried that she might have also dismantled the iron door and refurbished the outer walls when decorating.

When Garcia returned to the living room with a glass of water in her hand, Roland had stopped looking and leaned on the sofa to watch the TV.

"Thank you!" He fetched the glass. "You live here alone? But in the parent's meeting this morning, they all said that you're the daughter of the Clover..."

"No, I'm not. I've nothing to do with the Clover and instead, they're even my enemies." Garcia interrupted him in a cold tone.

"Enemies?" Roland was stunned. "Your cousin..."

Seemed somewhat depressed, she explained, "They apprehended this point and wanted my cousin to talk me into going back, but if I leave here, the Clover Association would dismantle this building."

"So it's the Clover Association that launched the mall expansion project next door?"

"Yes, who else dare to dismantle such an ancient building?" Garcia looked confused and asked, "You live here. Why don't you know this?"

This is going to be bad! She isn't Zero. She's a mature grown adult. If she inherits the characters of Princess Garcia, it would be more difficult to fool her.

At this thought, Roland explained and hurried to shift the topic. "Ahem... I've paid little attention to what's going on around this place. Plus, I've lost my job earlier and haven't stepped out of my apartment for almost six months. You've told me that a martialist will have some other jobs except for participating contests?"

"Yes. For a martialist, to participate in a contest is just equivalent to training. The most important mission of us is to fight against the outer erosion instead of winning the prize and publicizing the martial arts to the audience."

"What erosion?" he was stunned and asked.

"You should know Fallen Evils. They're one kind of them and the most common ones. They aren't people who lost their control of Force of Nature after awakening. Instead, they're eroded by the outside world and become another kind of creatures. Traditional forces can't harm them at all, so we need to stand out to fight against them," Garcia explained to him with a low voice.

Roland swallowed hard, and a sense of uneasiness was aroused in his heart. "The Dream World is eroded?"

"What's the meaning of the outside world?"

"I can't tell you more about that unless you join the Martialist Association and obtain a hunting license."

"Why?"

"Because not all people who have awakened with their Force of Nature will choose the side of the martialists." Garcia pronounced her words one by one. "Some people even hope that forces of the outside world could penetrate into our world. This kind of people

is hostile to all human beings. Hence, a hunting license won't only allow a person to fight against Fallen Evils but also enable a martialist to kill those awakened people who want to destabilize the society."

"So that's why it's called hunting license?" Roland was frightened hearing this. In other words, if I confirm that I've awakened with the Force of Nature and refuse to join their Martialist Association, will I be considered as their natural enemy?

Garcia shook her head as if she knew his concerns. "A small part of awakened people refused to join the Martialist Association, or to work for those men of evil. They're called centrists. Our Martialist Association won't do anything harmful to them, but Fallen Evils are different. Most centrists loved to act alone, so they were frequently attacked by such enemies. If you don't want to join the Martialist Association, you'd better hide your power forever."

Looking at Garcia who told him so much, Roland could not help but feel weird. He found that she appeared to be callous, but actually, she was not that difficult to communicate with. When they first met each other in this world, he had even thought that she was an arrogant lady who loved squinting at people.

At this thought, he finally spoke out his doubts tactfully, but she immediately rolled her eyes at him. "When we first met each other, your instant action was to touch the weapon on your back, so why should I be nice to you? You should feel lucky that you didn't pull out your weapon, otherwise, you had to go to a hospital to play plaster."

Just at this moment, Garcia's phone was ringing. She glimpsed at her phone and frowned, saying, "I got to take this phone call."

With these words, she took the phone into her bedroom and closed the door behind her.

Apparently, she did not want Roland to hear what she would talk on the phone.

"This is an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!" Roland thought.

He stood up right away and took off the slippers decorated with furry rabbit ears. He quickly walked to the end of the passage on barefoot.

Through the gaps in the louver door, he saw what was in there. Garcia had redecorated it into a cloakroom where there were various different female clothes, including many female underwears.

However, nothing could stop him from exploring the truth of this world.

He pushed the louver door without hesitation and smelling the fragrance of those female clothes, he walked into the compartment.

Walking through the layers of female clothes, he got to an iron-green gate appeared. He noticed that it was unlocked and thick

dust was on its handle, which was greatly contradictory to the surrounding clear walls.

Has Garcia never entered in and out of the Gate of Memory?

But this was not the proper moment to think through this problem. Roland took a deep breath and slightly pulled open the door.

The smell of salty seawater instantly filled his nasal cavity and a stroking sound of waves touching the beach came from afar. The deep blue sea just like a vast curtain slowly unfolded in front of him.

# Chapter 698: Nightingale's Suspicion

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It was the morning of the next day when he woke up from the Dream World.

Roland excitedly swung his fists in the bed as he found out that his guess was right. Every household in the Apartment of Souls has a gate leading to a memory fragment, just like his, and the world behind each gate was a place on which the loser living in the room, had once placed their biggest hope.

Given that, Princess Garcia must have left her last memory in the Port of Clearwater, the location of her lifetime's work and the starting point to compete to be the new ruler of Graycastle.

Due to the fact that Garcia could have hung up the phone at any time, Roland had not entered the gate to further explore its inside world. After all, he had been in an embarrassing position and it would not have been a pleasant experience if the martialist had considered him an underwear thief. Before leaving her room, he had tactfully asked her about the memory portal by complaining about the useless iron door in his own room, but her response was quite cold, even boring.

It meant that either she was telling a lie or she still did not notice the weird iron gate.

If the latter was true, it deserved to be thought through.



Perhaps, except for him, all of the people in the Apartment of Souls had no access to those sealed memories and he might be the only one that could see and open the memory portal.

It was simple to prove this thought. Next time he would ask Zero to clean up the lumber-room, and at that time, he would know the answer.

Anyway, it would be an exciting discovery.

Since the demons swallowed by Zero held the key, it was not necessary for him to explore each household thoroughly. The demons had become the residents of the Apartment of Souls. Finding them and entering their memory fragments might help him find some useful information about the Battle of Divine Will.

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When he went to his office, Wendy had been waiting for him for quite some time.

There was a stack of resumes on the desk, which was the detailed information about the four witches from the Kingdom of Wolfheart. Although he had known the general situation from Yorko, he was also willing to conduct a whole review of it, especially those things happening in the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

Roland read each page of the document co-written by Wendy and

Scroll. In the end, he fixed his eyes on the name of Annie.

He felt quite familiar when he first heard of Annie. After Nightingale reminded him, he remembered the resentful history between the Bloodfang Association and the witches of the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

However, Annie was a quite common name, especially among the poor people in the lower class. At least, five or six out of 100 girls were named Annie, so it was normal to repeatedly hear the name. But the resume clearly recorded that she had indeed looked for the Bloodfang Association, and that she had not only been rejected but also almost sold to the nobles, so she was probably the "sister Annie" mentioned by Iffy.

"I have to say that such a coincidence is really filled with dramas."

A week ago, he had received a confidential letter delivered by a carrier pigeon from Fjords. The letter read that Tilly and the other witches had started their trip. They should have done half of the trip by now. He did not know what the scene would be like when the two met.

Although the reunion was not all about joys, and Iffy would certainly have a mixed bag of feelings of happiness and guilt, would Annie forgive Iffy who had betrayed her?

Roland secretly sighed and hoped that the time would heal the trauma between them.

He closed the resume and looked up to see Wendy asking, "Which places have you decided to show them around today?"

"Your Majesty," Wendy replied, "I want to give them a tour of North Slope Mine, the steam engine assembly plant as well as the Chaos Drinks plant."

The proposal was put forward by Wendy that the Witch Union would lead new witches to show them around Neverwinter. As far as she was concerned, this method would let newcomers be familiar with the local life and eliminate some unnecessary precautions and misunderstandings at the same time. After a two-day visiting tour and one-day resting, they could voluntarily choose to sign a contract or not, which had become a usual practice for the Union. Since Roland left the management of the witches to Wendy, she gradually got to the right track.

Judging from the visiting spots she had picked, these places all demonstrated that witches could collaborate with the subjects and also proved to them that the assistant witches could cast their abilities for other purposes, not only for fighting.

Roland nodded in satisfaction and said, "So I leave all this matter to you. Please take Lightning and Maggie with you. If something unexpected happens, they can help you control the situation."

After all, Wendy was not good at fighting and he also thought that every new witch would not be as nice as Anna. If there were two assistants flying in the sky to keep them alerted and Wendy

had a revolver, she could deal with most unexpected emergencies.

"I see."

"By the way, what do you think of the guide?" He changed the topic.

"You mean No.76?"

"Yeah." Roland took a sip of tea. Usually, he would not spend his precious time on a normal slave, but Yorko spoke highly of her. Additionally, after hearing the story told by his old friend, he also respected such a lady that would sacrifice her own life to save others. If there was no problem in her identity and background, he would like to offer her a good job.

"She gets along with the four witches, especially Amy who considers her as a relative. As for me, if No.76 were vicious, she wouldn't have saved others' lives at the expense of her own life at the critical junction."

"We have the same thought. What if she is appointed to be a clerk of Witch Union? I remember that there are only three or four people in your office. If you have more subordinates, you'll find it easier to manage the organization."

This position did not have extra requirements. The salary was acceptable and the job was quite easy. As long as she got on well with the witches, she was eligible to do the job.

Wendy smiled, "I've no problems if she's willing to take the job."

"No, Your Majesty," Nightingale abruptly appeared and interrupted him, "don't offer her any job at present."

Roland was stunned, then asked, "Is there anything wrong?"

"I... I can't tell," she hesitated for a while and continued, "but I can feel something isn't right."

He took a weird look at Nightingale and kept silent for a while before saying, "I got it. Put this job thing aside."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

After Wendy bowed and stepped out his office, Nightingale anxiously held Roland's hands and asked, "Sorry, Your Majesty. Am I going... too far?"

"For the sake of safety?"

"Yes."

"That's what you should do." He tapped the backs of her hands and comforted her, "You're responsible for the internal security of Neverwinter and you're not the one to blame if you're extra cautious about that. But no records in your documents suggest that

something is wrong with her. What on earth is the problem?"

Hearing that, Nightingale relaxed a bit. "No.76 didn't lie and my ability can also prove it. But..." She paused for a moment and spoke out her doubts. "I think that she doesn't behave like a normal slave when she's faced with strangers, so it would be safer, if I'm given more time, to observe her."

# Chapter 699: An Unappeasable Mood

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When No. 76 entered the living room, the other four witches were sitting around the round table and enjoying the new food that had just been provided by the servant.

"Good morning," Amy was the first one to greet her, "Come over here and have breakfast. Besides bread, we have fried eggs and milk this time! I haven't had such a sumptuous meal in a long time."

"Sure," She agreed, a happy look on her face, as she took a seat beside Amy. After losing her sense of taste, food was only consumed to sustain life, while the process had become torturous. Having this affliction for hundreds of years now, she could calmly engulf the trash-like, tasteless food. She would then provide the appropriate praised based on her distant memories. "This is really delicious!"

"Isn't it?" Amy mumbled as she chewed some egg, "It has been over a year since I last ate fried eggs..."

"Don't complain, at least you ate it a year ago." Broken Sword objected, "I haven't eaten fried eggs in almost 10 years."

"Ahem..." Annie cleared her throat and said, "there is someone who has never eaten a fried egg."

"Who?" The three echoed, all in a daze.

"Me." Annie pointed to herself before continuing, "When I was in my village, my neighbor raised a flock of old hens. I always wanted to crawl into the henhouse and steal an egg so I could have a taste. But, my first attempt ended with me almost being beaten to death by my father, with a rolling pin, after he discovered me."

"Your father is honest." Hero said in a respectful tone.

"Honest?" She shrugged and said, "he was only afraid that the neighbor would discover me and make a claim for damages. As for the eggs, I had stolen, they were eaten by my father and younger brother."

The living room instantly fell into a brief silence.

"Ahem, let's have our breakfast," Hero deflected, somewhat embarrassed.

"Pfft..." Amy was the first to burst into laughter, "Hahaha...so that's what happened...haha..."

As soon as Amy laughed, the rest of the witches were unable to restrain their laughter.

Even No. 76 could not help but smile herself. After struggling to survive for so long, these witches finally found a peaceful home. From here, she felt like she could see the epitome of Taquila in its heyday.



No, it was not the epitome any longer. She told herself that Neverwinter would be the new Holy City and that the witches would be bound to regain their glory.

Because The Chosen One had appeared.

"Huh, you didn't sleep well, did you?" Amy stretched out her hand to wipe the corner of No. 76's eyes, "You have dark circles under your eyes."

"Oh...maybe," No. 76 lowered her head as she replied, "I was too excited to fall asleep last night."

Even though she only needed two hours of deep sleep to replenish her spirit, she couldn't go days without sleep. If a soul was overused, the effects were reflected in the physical body, which was a big taboo for witches. After all, a damaged and senile body could be remedied while a traumatized soul would remain perpetually withered.

How could she sleep though! She did not want to fall into the dark dormancy at all, she was afraid that everything was just a dream and that when she woke up, The Chosen One would have disappeared into thin air.

What she needed most was to find the one with the orange light and to contact Pasha.

It really wasn't going to be easy.

According to Wendy, most of the witches lived in the Witch Building of the Castle District. However, she wasn't a witch and she couldn't enter the castle by joining the Union. It was unlikely that she could depend on these witches from the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

Of course, she could risk being discovered and try to sneak into the castle. That way she could confirm The Chosen One, unfortunately, that was not a smart option. She didn't know if The Chosen One would believe her and the green-haired witch, that had the ability for magic perception, was difficult to deal with. No.76 wasn't sure if she could smoothly extract The Chosen One through the maze ruins while being pursued by combat witches. God's Punishment Army was born to battle witches, but they were not invincible.

There was also the local lord that happened to be dreadfully powerful, which acted as a type of deterrent. Since the lord could defeat Starfall City they feared him taking possession of the many soldiers of God's Punishment Army.

Since they lost the ability to repopulate, they needed humans to help them restrengthen their numbers, even if the demons are defeated. Hence, Pasha being right about them needing to, sooner or later, cooperate with the Four Kingdoms.

Therefore, unless absolutely necessary, Taquila wouldn't turn against the Kingdom of Graycastle.

Of course, if the king wanted to kill The Chosen One, it would leave her no choice. Even if she had to sacrifice herself, she would protect The Chosen One, who could dominate the Battle of the Divine Will.

"Can't you nap later?" Amy hid her smile as she said, "The servant informed us that lunch and dinner will be served on time, so unlike before, we don't need to go out and spend the day finding our own food."

"No worries, Miss Nana completely cured me." No. 76 stated while patting her chest, indicating her energy had been replenished. Then she hesitated before asking, "Is Lady Wendy going to show you around Neverwinter later? I...I don't want to stay alone."

"You can come with us," Amy responded instantly.

"But..."

"Don't worry about it, we can hang around the streets. Plus, if you come, you can help carry Hero."

"I understand," Broken Sword echoed, "I don't like staying alone in the room, either."

"I'm sorry if I am any trouble for you," Hero smiled at No. 76.

Annie calmly said, "Don't worry. I'll talk to Lady Wendy about it."

"Thank you..." No. 76 bowed deeply, lowering her head.

She had to admit that she had some affections for this younger generation. Even though they weren't considered a combat witches, the survivors of the Union had gradually started to change their minds. After 400 years, with the constantly shifting fortunes from prosperity to poverty and their hopeless lives in the deep cave, their moods were finally starting to shift.

However, they did not have to take turns carrying Hero as they had expected.

Wendy brought a delicate wheelchair.

"You can push the wheels to drive it back and forth. If you rotate the wheels you can change directions." She personally demonstrated this as she explained, "Anna and Soraya worked together overnight to forge this wheelchair. With it, Hero can go anywhere, within a limited area."

Hearing the name of Anna, No. 76 was startled. Wasn't Anna the High Awakened claimed by Nana? Would they really go through so much trouble for a common witch who had lost her legs?

"Thank you...My Lady," Hero said, choking back tears.

"You're welcome. Please regard Neverwinter as your personal home." Wendy said gently, "As I've mentioned, all the witches here are your sisters."

While Hero familiarized herself with the wheelchair, Annie asked Wendy, the leader of the Union, if No. 76 could join them.

However, Wendy didn't respond quickly, instead, she turned to look at her. After a moment passed Wendy nodded, "Sure, what's one person more." However, the long pause caught No. 76 off guard.

Somehow, the pause made her feel uneasy.

Is my inspection not over yet?

# Chapter 700: The First Senior Witch

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It would be meaningless to fret over the matter now as she had to follow those four even if that would catch attention from others; this would be the best opportunity to observe the city and the Witch Union closely. If she waited until the witches entered the Castle District, it would be much harder to keep in contact with them.

With that thought, No.76 showed Wendy a somewhat timid smile. "I'm sorry to have caused to so much trouble."

"See, I told you that Miss Wendy wouldn't mind," Amy said with a grin.

Instead, it was Annie who sensed something strange. She looked at the two people and did not say a word.

"Let's go." After Hero became a bit familiar with using the wheelchair, Wendy clapped her hands and smiled. "Our first stop for today is the central area of Neverwinter, North Slope Mine!"

"Mine?" All five of them were dumbfounded for a moment.

"What's the point of visiting a mine?" That was the first thought came to No. 76's mind. She could bet that the rest of the group were having similar thoughts. In both Taquila and the Kingdom of Dawn, labors such as mining were all distributed to slaves or prisoners. The working environment in the mine was extremely hazardous. It was common to have deaths and injuries for heavy

labors like mining and transporting. Only the valueless ones would be left in the mines to perish.

"Perhaps Wendy's purpose is to exhort newcomers like us to behave ourselves by showing us the consequences of disobedience?" No. 76 guessed.

However, there were no hints of threat in Wendy's tone. "Instead of a mine, it's more like the source of power to Neverwinter. The more steel that one could produce, the more qualified the one would become to represent justice. This is a sentence that His Majesty always says to us. It's a mouthful, right?" There was a lingering smile in her eyes when she talked about the king. "Anyways, you guys will know when you guys see it."

"Represent... justice?"

No. 76 pondered this phrase several times in her mind and still failed to figure out the relation between steel and justice.

When they walked out of the Foreign Affairs Building, the snow on the street had been cleaned. They did not know what kind of magical method that the locals used, there was now only a puddle of water at where the heavy snow had previously piled up. New snow was flowing from the sky, but much less compared to that a few days ago. Hectic freemen were everywhere on the street, seeming to have endless work, they walked hurriedly through the streets and allies in the snow. It was the serene time of severe winter and the Months of Demons, but the whole city was filled with liveliness.

The Five-Colored Stone heated up again, she looked around and soon found her target. There were two people above her head... no, it was a human and a bird, presumably coming to keep an eye on them.

The Witch Union had impressed No. 76 furthermore this time. Such means and conscientiousness were comparable to the small city-state during the Taquila age. It did not seem like a wild witch organization after the decline of the Union.

Besides, she also confirmed that her judgment was accurate, with the clairvoyant power of the green-haired witch, plus the tracking of the flying witch, it would be impossible for her to escape from this place after having exposed her identity.

"Since we've got some time on the way to the mine, let me simply introduce the identity of the witch along with some knowledge regarding witches' power." The red-haired witch led the group to the north and said, "Since the awakening stage, witches are facing the trouble of the magic power bites. The church used to call it the Demonic Torture. However, it's actually a natural reaction due to the continual growth of magic power. You guys must have already known this point by now."

Annie calmly nodded and said, "Yes, otherwise it would be difficult to survive through adulthood."

Amy raised her hand and added, "I heard about it from Broken Sword."



Broken Sword said with a little embarrassment, "I used my powers quite frequently at the time when I wandered in the wilderness. I was just randomly guessing though."

Wendy exclaimed with a sigh. "The Witch Cooperation Association said the same words too. It's a blessing that we all made it through. Once we've stepped into adulthood, the original power of the witch will be solidified and a witch might even develop a derivative skill. The specific symptom is that the magic swirl in her body will expand and becomes distinct."

"What's that?" Amy asked in curiosity.

"Something that every witch has, it's like an air current that never ceases to stop swirling." Wendy patted the young girl's head lovingly. "Only a few witches are able to observe them. It's the exact form of the magic power, the specifics of its form determine the type of magic power."

"Is, Is that so?" Amy asked in astonishment.

Wendy smiled and said, "Wait until the day to test your magic power. These are all the items that need to be recorded. By that time, you'll know the look of the magic swirl inside your body."

No. 76 could not help but frown, thinking, "Has this kind of knowledge about the survival of witches become a secret? What did Starfall City do? The more witches survive, the more ingredients they'll have to establish the God's Punishment Army."

Why did they block information like this?"

"Or perhaps, in these 400 years, the witches of Starfall City deviated from the will of Lady Alice?"

Wendy continued to explain, "However, the day of adulthood isn't the end of a witch's magical power. Besides the consolidation of power, there's even the evolution of power. There are no limits on the number of times a power can evolve. It'll not be confined to the original power either. As long as a witch continues to strengthen her understanding of herself and magic power, her ability will continue to evolve."

"Really?" Amy exclaimed in excitement. "Someone like me could evolve too?"

"Of course. As long as you study hard." With these words, Wendy took out a thin silver plate with a red crystal embedded in it and said, "Come to me, I want to introduce a new sister to you all."

No. 76 could not believe what she saw. "That's... The Sigil of Listening?"

Her pupils contracted all the sudden. "How can a wild witch organization own the heritage of the Holy City of Taquila ?"

"No... they would have such a chance. They might find a couple of remaining Sigils of Listening from the scattered ruins of the kingdom. This equipment was usually distributed to Blessed

Warriors. I remember... the Quest Society never made such crude Sigils of Listening."

"Yes, it looks like an incomplete sigil. Like a temporary test target made by some unknown witch."

As soon as the red-haired witch finished her sentence, the silhouette in the sky rushed down and perched on her head.

It turned out to be a lovely blonde girl and a fat white pigeon which No.76 thought must be the girl's pet.

The group still stood agape as they were shocked by the speaking crystal.

"Hello, everyone." The young girl showed a bright smile. "My name is Lightning, the greatest adventurer of Neverwinter!"

"I'm Maggie! Coo-Coo!" Pigeon said and spread its wings.

"Gosh, the bird is talking!" Amy widened her eyes.

"They're witches," Annie said calmly, "The power is most likely related to changing the body shape."

"You guessed right." Wendy stretched her arm to allow the Pigeon to rest on it. "She's a sister of ours that went through the evolution of power."

"So it's not a pet..." No. 76 blanked out for a moment. "Wait, what did she say? That pigeon called Maggie is a Senior Witch?"

She stared at the pigeon. It rubbed Wendy's cheek amiably and spread its wings and lifted its head up when being introduced to the group. It seemed to be presenting its strength by doing so. She could not help but wonder, "Is, is it really a Senior Witch?"

"Back in Taquila , she would be able to join the upper class of the Union and become one of the rulers of the Holy City!"

"I should show respect to every Senior Witch. It's an unbreakable rule of the Union, but..."

No. 76 felt something cracked in her heart.

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